World Vision
FUTURE FOR CHILDREN

Religious diversity in the life worlds of children in Germany and in Ghana in 2023

5th World Vision Children Study

Foreword

Christoph Waffenschmidt
Chief Executive Officer of World Vision Deutschland e. V.

World Vision is an internationally active children's aid organization working together with a multitude of different faith communities around the globe. In Germany, the number of those who are not members of a faith group is on the rise. Worldwide, however, 84% of the global population identify with a religious group. We have learned from our work that the coexistence of religions and interfaith dialogue is better in many other countries than in Germany, and this includes our partner country Ghana.

When we talk about religious diversity in Germany, it is usually in the context of an expectation of social problems or conflicts, that may arise from it. This is remarkable because a large part of the adult German population has no or very little personal contact with people of other faiths and therefore experiences religious diversity only indirectly, for example through media reports. The life worlds many children grow up in today, however, are very different. Especially in the metropolitan areas, children have contact with peers from different backgrounds at school and during leisure activities. If we want to know what religious diversity means in everyday life, the challenges it poses, but also the opportunities it offers, we should therefore speak with the children. Our study indicates that children are highly skilled pluralists and highly competent in interacting with each another. Their contacts and friendships can build a bridge between different faiths and secular worldviews. Children accept different faiths and practices, even if they appear to be in conflict to their own. They are able to agree on common values and, first and foremost, embrace their common identity as children before other social aspects even become relevant.

Even though most children in Germany and Ghana are generally open to and tolerant of people of other faiths, our data still show an interesting difference: While tolerance of other faiths is on the rise among the children of Ghana for whom their faith is very important and who, together with their families, observe their religious practices, the opposite seems to be the true for Germany. This finding indicates that there is no single and immediate connection between religiosity and tolerance. Instead, it highlights that the general social contexts need to be considered.

Our interviews with children in Ghana show that a good understanding of other religions does not have to go along with alienation from your own faith, and that practising the own faith can even strengthen tolerance of other faiths. Religious diversity will be an essential part of our future in Germany, for many children it has long been a part of their everyday lives. As the German society, we are called upon to embrace this change, which has long been part of the everyday lives of many of our children, and to promote forward-looking concepts for a positive, constructive coexistence of different religions, also and especially in our faith communities.

Warm regards,

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01. Introduction

World Vision Germany has been conducting the World Vision Children Study since 2007. The data for the first four studies were collected in Germany only. The representative data provided information on the well-being of children and young people in Germany and how they view various social problems such as poverty, social (in)justice and displacement. This 5th World Vision Children Study is different because, for the first time, the data was collected not only in Germany, but also in our partner country Ghana. Conducted in cooperation with religious education specialist Prof. Dr. Britta Konz of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, World Vision Ghana and data service provider Ipsos, we surveyed 2500 children aged 6 to 16 in both countries. These children were from different parts of the country and different social groups.

In planning this study, we focused how the children handled religious diversity as a current challenge for a society that is characterized by large Christian and Muslim faith communities, as well as a variety of smaller belief groups. While Ghana has a longer history of interfaith coexistence, experiences with religious diversity in Germany mostly depend on your generation. Today's children, adolescents, and young adults often have more real-life experience and competence in dealing with diversity than their parents and grandparents (cf. Zimmer/Stein 2020: 6). Urban areas in particular are the "contact zones" (Pratt 1991) of the most diverse social, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups for the young generations as they go to the same schools and recreational places.

On the problem of international childhood research

World Vision's Children Study is based on the assumption that, while children are socialized and integrated in social structures and cultural contexts, they are at the same time co-influencers of their life worlds, i.e. they "co-influence, co-shape, and thus (have the ability to) change its structures and patterns" (Liebel 2017 11). As a result, there is also "not just one childhood, but there are always different childhoods [...], be it with regard to history, the course of a person's life, or as a result of social and cultural differences" (Liebel 2017: 11). While childhood, developmental, and family studies increasingly include the voices of children, most of them are conducted from the perspective of "Western cultures" (Hosny et al 2020:- 3521). This eurocentric world view is currently critically viewed in Germany. This is reflected in the reappraisal of our colonial history, in debates about everyday racism in Germany (#metwo), in the recognition of the 1904 Herero and Nama genocide, or in the return of looted art. This goes hand in hand with the call for a departure from a paternalism labelling African countries as backward and largely viewing a childhood outside of Europe and North America from the perspective of a "Western narrative of modernity" (Morrison 2012; Liebel 2017: 12). Stereotypes of African countries and their people still dominate public and academic discourses. Children in Africa are mostly depicted as "helpless victims in need, who live in extraordinary circumstances" and don't have a "normal" life. They are ridiculed, pitied—and sometimes even feared—as "children without childhood' (Liebel 2017: 13), especially when they migrate to Germany and request social inclusion.

To date, the voices of children from African countries have not been not adequately considered in research. While development and family studies have increasingly included the views of children, these voices are primarily from "Western cultures" (Hosny et al 2020: 3522) or they are considered as irrelevant. Rarely are they put into relation with each other to form a global narrative, in which "the different and changing living conditions and ways of life of children around the world are being put into their respective spacial and temporal dimensions" (Liebel 2017: 13). This undermines the potential value of children's narratives as portals to existing socio-cultural scripts beyond or aside from "Western frameworks" (Hosny et al 2020: 3521, with regard to: Harwood et al. 1997; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008).

In countries around the world, children are speaking up, expressing their unique cultures and interfering in the world of adults "through own initiatives and movements" (Liebel 2017: 71). These can differ considerably in terms of interests pursued, interpretation of their life worlds, and participation opportunities used (Liebel 2017: 71). The "Global North's" perception and thought patterns applied to the 'Global South' therefore need be reviewed, and the same applies to the concepts of childhood, "as well as to the question in which way children and adolescents can understood as social subjects who possess agency" (Liebel 2017: 71).

Photo: AJ_Watt

Research question and structure of this study

With regard to the challenges of development cooperation in the post-colonial era, this study aims at a twofold departure from paternalistic thinking: Firstly, children are to be taken seriously and seen as subjects and competent interview partners, and have their say. This applies in particular to children from African countries, who, in public discourse, are predominantly viewed as the passive victims of poverty when, in fact, they are agentic subjects of society Accordingly, little is known to date about the subjective experience of children in Ghana, their perceptions and beliefs, and the values that shape their daily lives (Hosny et al 2020: 3523). Our hope is also that this international comparative study will contribute to entering into a discussion about relevance and view points, instead of applying the 'Western' mindset to other circumstances. This concerns, in particular, the question of the relevance of religion and of secular life orientations and world views. While religion is often given a subordinate, marginal role in the German discussion, and the number of people in Germany who are not part of a faith group is growing, it plays a much more important role in most other countries. Approximately 84% of people worldwide identify with some form of religion (Pew Research Center 2012 & 2017) Religious practices and rituals are community-building, religious beliefs are used in dealing with experiences of contingency, but also misused for political purposes, and religious positions are negotiated—even through conflicts.

The focus of this Children Study, religious diversity, therefore concerns a range of globally highly explosive topics, and a subject that is of particular importance for our partner country Ghana The present study explores the question of the importance of faith in the life worlds of the children surveyed, their contacts with people from other faith groups, and their way of dealing with non-believers. Of particular interest in the comparison of the countries studied, Germany and Ghana, is that in the German discourse, religiosity is often seen as potentially associated with hostility towards the members of other religions, while this aspect rarely is the subject of debate in Ghana. In conclusion, this study therefore explores the relationship between religiosity and being tolerant of people of other faiths, and if (and how) children experience rejection, stigmatization, and discrimination as a result of their religion.

Photo: PeopleImages

02. Religious diversity in the surveyed countries

Photo: FatCamera

The people of Ghana can generally be described as very religious, and religion is an important part of most people's everyday lives (Aidoo/Botchway 2021: 425). Most people in Ghana spend much time participating in religious events, and even non-religious meetings often start with prayer, with religion influencing politics, economics, education, and parenting (Hosny et al 2020: 3522 referring to: Okyerefo and Fiaveh 2017). Historically, interfaith coexistence in Ghana goes back to the 15th century. Through colonization, the population of Ghana, who until then had their own (indigenous) religious practices, came into contact with Christianity, and in the 18th century with Islam.

Christianity in its various forms, Islam as well as indigenous religious practices, often colloquially referred to as 'traditional religious beliefs/religions', are the main faith groups in Ghana today (Nonterah 2016: 197; Nkrumah-Pobi/Owusu-Afriyie 2020: 74). In terms of interfaith coexistence, Ghana pursues the principle of "peaceful cohabitation" (cf. Nonterah 2016: 197). However, social rejection of atheism and indigenous religious beliefs and practices is widespread, and the big religious groups also repeatedly instrumentalise religion in the context of social conflicts (cf. Nonterah, 2016: 197). Ghana's north is dominated by Muslims, while the Christian population is the majority in the south Ghana has seen violent clashes between members of different religious groups in all parts of the country (Nkrumah-Pobi/Owusu-Afriyie 2020: 76). Election campaigns are also repeatedly trying to use religion or ethnicity as a political instrument, an approach, which is met with strong criticism in the country (Aidoo/Botchway 2021: 439). On the other hand, political parties are trying to reach a broader group of voters by nominating Christian as well as Muslim candidates (Ibid 231). Many Christian and Muslim groups are working towards peace and tolerance (Nkrumah-Pobi/Owusu-Afriyie 2020: 77). In accordance with the assumption that religion or faith has an exclusive truth claim (Nkrumah-Pobi; Owusu-Afriyie 2020: 80), religion is often assigned the status of a "neutral platform" (Aidoo/Botchway 2021: 425) across political and ethnic affiliations, enabling the participation of citizens in social disputes beyond political, ethnic, gender or class differences (Aidoo/Botchway 2021: 425).

Religion in Germany is currently undergoing massive changes (Polke 2020: 28). "Not only empirically, but also in terms of narrative, Germany is a country of immigration and in a process of transformation. In this process, affiliations, identities, participation, and equality of opportunities are being negotiated (Winkler 2022: 286). As an immigration society, the country is experiencing growing religious pluralization on the one hand, and massive deconfessionalisation on the other, and this process, in all likelihood, will continue in the years to come. (cf. Polke 2020: 28). Freedom of faith in Germany is guaranteed by the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (Grundgesetz), and the population of Germany is characterized by a wide range of faiths and secular positions and worldviews: At school, for example, many children who are brought up in a secular home, come into contact with children "for whom religion is potentially and often actually a fundamental dimension of life, and a key element of their identity" (Simojoki/Kühn 2020: 209). While the increase in the percentage of the Muslim population in Germany received little notice for many decades, with cultural differences being the focus of discussions, the terror attacks on September 11, 2001 were a major turning point for interfaith coexistence in Germany and gave rise to the emergence of Islamophobia (cf. Nagel 2015: 201). It goes along with a social discourse in which religion is problematised (often overlapping with other differentiation categories such as culture and nationality) in the social discourse when it comes to the subject of inclusion and participation (Vollmer/Karakayali 2017). According to Mecheril (2002: 109), Germany is historically based on the concept of a "national ethnic cultural" identity of the nation state. Religious minorities are seen as "the others" (cf. Lingen-Ali/Mecheril 2016: 17), which has the potential of going along with different forms of discrimination and microaggression in everyday life (Sue et al 2007: 278 et seq.; Pica-Smith 2009; Elkassem et al 2018). In the social debate, religion is often seen as a threat to the "model of personal freedom": It is emphasized that—under "the guise of religion"—murder was being committed, abuse taking place, "achievements of individual self-determination and equality were being denied" and "outdated privileges defended" (Wissmann 2020: 47). Moreover, potentially explosive conspiracy myths are on the rise in Germany, as is anti-Semitism. Other than that, there is a broad social consensus for a democratic approach to religious diversity, and many church-based and social initiatives are working to support intercultural (or cross-cultural) and interfaith coexistence.

03. Theoretical and methodical principles of the World Vision Children Study

Photo: World Vision

How religion/world view influences children's view of the world

As an internationally operating, interfaith children's aid organization, our Children Study aimed to provide insights into the diverse religious and non-religious values held by children living in different contexts of life, with the 5th World Vision Children Study focusing on children's perceptions of religious matters and religious diversity.

Childhood and adolescence are stages of life in which identity-forming processes play a major role, and this can also include the development of a personal religious identity. The (non-)affiliation with a religious group is initiated in the context of socialization, a process in which children are influenced by their social environment, their families and peers. The participation in practices and rituals of the respective religion can provide an "emotionally meaningful sense of belonging" (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 201) and enable social integration in a community (2013: 13). However, it can potentially also go along with social discrimination and exclusion.

Religion can be seen as an "instrument for building collectives, a tool of inclusion and exclusion, and for establishing and enforcing social hierarchies", "whereby the character of religion as a "construction", analogous to categories such as culture and ethnicity or gender and dis/ability, should be emphasized" (Willems 2020: 11–12). In addition to seeing religion as a "mode of communalisation," it can also be understood as a "specific 'approach to discovering and understanding the world" (Willems 2020: 12) as well as providing a framework "within which questions of meaning, life orientation and dealing with contingency are processed" (Willems 2020: 12).

In this context, religious identity comes into view as a personal, psychological dimension, if it can provide answers to questions of meaning and convey value orientation for difficult situations (Betz et al. 2014: 8; Konz/ Rohde-Abuba 2022). In this way, religion can be a significant part of personal identity, enabling people to establish a "sense of coherence and continuity" for themselves and others, especially in difficult situations or challenging circumstances. (Kohli 2000: 115; cf. Konz 2022: 75). In coping with experiences of contingency, i.e. with the uncertainties of human life, especially illness and death, religious relevance systems and interpretation patterns acquired during socialization can play a very important role (Ritter et al 2006: 194–195). Religious explanations can provide support and guidance and help to "make sense of the world and find meaning in the events of your own life" (Klein/Albani 2011: 229). In addition, religions provide rituals and traditions, and offer stories that contain an "extensive body of both suffering and coping experiences" (Klein/Albani 2011: 229) as well as action strategies.

Research on childhood and children's religiosity has undergone a major shift in recent decades. While up until the 1980s, children were seen as passive learners of 'adult cultural behaviours', the focus in the 1990s shifted to how children shape society as actors and agents in social processes (Corsaro 1996; Honig 2009; Mayall 2001) and how they "express their own interests and needs in their decisions, actions" (Wihstutz 2019: 28). Accordingly, the perspective of religious education has also changed: Children are now seen as religious actors in their life worlds, instead of merely being in the process of becoming (based on Kammeyer 2012: 40). Child theology now works on the assumption that children are capable of independently wording questions to God and applying religious interpretations to the experiences they in their respective life worlds. Depending on their perspective, they assign a personal or no meaning to specific religious practices and can express to what extent they perceive God as an "approachable presence" (Ulfat 2017: 245) with whom they can communicate in their own way about their experiences, desires, anxieties, and everyday concerns (cf. Ulfat 2017: 245). In doing so, they rely on the (religious) interpretations conveyed in their socialization process. However, children do not simply adopt the interpretations of the world offered by their environment; instead, as the "builders of their reality" (Kraft 2004: 172), they independently adapt these interpretations.

Speaking with children: The research design of the Children Study

The 5th World Vision Children Study was conducted from 2020 until 2023 in close cooperation between World Vision Deutschland, World Vision Ghana and teams of data services provider Ipsos in both countries. The study design was that of a qualitative and quantitative triangulated survey. As a first step

of our research, we therefore conducted so-called qualitative, in-depth individual interviews with a small number of children (15 children aged 6–16) in both countries. In-depth interviews are guideline-based one-on-one conversations of approximately one to one and a half hours where the aim is to encourage children to speak, as uninfluenced as possible, about their experiences or attitudes with regard to specific life world topics. Among other things, we spoke with them about the situations in which they tend to turn to God and how they feel when they do so, if they can think any of everyday situations in which they act according to or against the religious values they know, if they are aware of the religious affiliation of other children in their lives, and in which situations different beliefs or practices stand out or come up. In their narratives on these and similar topics, the children spontaneously and independently assigned meaning, taking recourse to their relevant belief system, whereby religion can, but does not necessarily have to be important in terms of a collective bond and/or a personal relationship with God, underlining the range of different perspectives (see "Sample", further below).

Based on the results of this qualitative survey, we then developed a standardized questionnaire with questions that mean the same in both surveyed countries. This questionnaire was used to collect the representative statistical data. The prior in-depth interviews allowed us—especially with regard to this as yet little researched topic—to collect information on what children know about religions, about the beliefs and practices are meaningful or not meaningful to them, and about the words they use when they talk about religion. The contents and the words the children used could be transferred, to a large extent, to the questionnaire and enabled us to conduct a child-friendly survey, something that is much more difficult when a questionnaire reflects adult perspectives and words used by adults only.

As a result of the current situation, the standardized questionnaire featured two domains, the contents of which, however, were interwoven in part; 1) The perspective of children regarding religious diversity in their life worlds 2) How they experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. This publication focuses on the data gathered on the topic of religion; other aspects, for example how the children experienced being home-schooled during the pandemic, were already published in April 2021 and September 2022.

Collection and analysis of the qualitative data (in-depth interviews)

Between June and September 2020 in Germany and Ghana, 15 interviews were conducted in each country with children and youths between the ages of 6 and 16. The interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. In four cases, we interviewed sibling pairs. Except for one interview which was conducted with a fifteen-year-old girl via Skype, all interviews were face-to-face interviews in the children's homes. All hygiene and contact rules applicable in the respective region at the time of conducting the interview, including social distancing, hand hygiene, and the wearing masks, were observed
In order to explore the specific questions and response categories for the subsequent standardized questionnaire as broadly as possible, care was taken to ensure that the qualitative sample included children from a wide range of society. With regard to religiosity, the interviews in Germany included children who identified as Roman-Catholic, protestant, Muslim, members of an independent Christian church, Jewish, Greek-Orthodox or atheist. The children interviewed in Ghana identified as Catholic, Evangelical, members of an independent Christian church, Protestant, Charismatic, Pentecostal, Muslim, or as following an indigenous ('traditional') religion. We were unable to recruit any atheist or otherwise non-religious children for our interviews in Ghana, which may be due to the low prevalence and stigmatization of atheism in the country. In addition to religious affiliation, care was taken to ensure the diversity of the sample in terms of socio-economic level and area of residence. Different major cities in different regions were chosen in both countries to conduct the interviews, and also used as starting points for going into rural areas. In Germany, our data were collected in the cities of Bremen, Berlin, Leipzig, Cologne, Munich, Frankfurt am Main, and surrounding rural areas. In Ghana, our data were gathered in the cities of Accra, Cape Coast, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Hohoe, and rural areas.

The sample also included different ethnic groups. Seven children in Germany had a 'migration background' (Turkish, Polish, Greek, Italian, Pakistani). All children were interviewed in German in accordance with their ability to speak the language. The children interviewed in Ghana were from the Ga, Akan, Kasin, Ewe, Gurma, Ga-Adangbe, and Mole Dagbani ethnic groups. The interviews were conducted in English, Ewe, Fante, Ga, and Gurma. The main language of the interviews was English, but children sometimes switched to another language to provide additional explanations. For the purpose of anonymity, children were asked to choose a first name by which they wanted to be quoted. Many children in Ghana chose acronyms (e.g., QZN), which were either the initials of several given names or a transliteration of names in their respective languages.

An interview guideline of equivalent meaning was used for all interviews; this was developed in collaboration between World Vision employees in Germany and Ghana and translated into the different languages. The interview guideline included episodic-narrative, conceptual-semantic, and projective questions to explore the research topic as comprehensively and from as many perspectives as possible. In addition, stimulus material was created to help the children and adolescents express their thoughts and feelings during the interview. For the series of questions about the COVID-19 pandemic, we used picture cards that made use of emojis to portray different emotions and activities that structure daily routines to start the conversation .

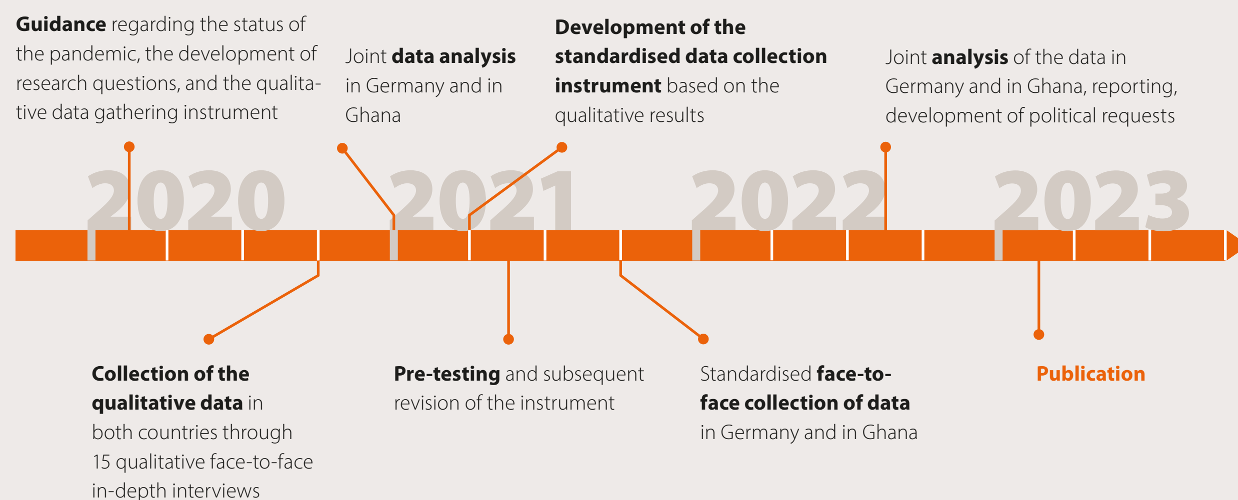
Collection and analysis of the quantitative data

Based on the qualitative results, a standardized questionnaire was developed in collaboration with World Vision Ghana and Ipsos Germany and Ghana in the first half of 2021. The standardized questionnaire featured items with equivalent meaning and was used to collect information in German in Germany and in English, Ewe, Fante, Ga, and Gurma in Ghana.

In both countries, children aged 6–16 from a wide range of backgrounds were interviewed, as well as a parent or authorised caregiver (in a separate interview). The sample size was approx. 2500 persons in Germany and approx. 2500 persons in Ghana. The age groups 6–9 years, 10–13 years, and 14–16 years were almost equally distributed in both countries, with half of the respondents being boys and half being girls. The interviews with the children took on average approx. 38 minutes in Germany and approx. 52 minutes in Ghana. They were conducted at the children's homes in the form of face-to-face interviews, and in due compliance with the contact and hygiene rules applicable at the time.

In Germany, the respondents were quota-sampled based on age, gender, region, 'migration background', religious affiliation. In Ghana, they were quota-sampled based on age, gender, region, ethnicity, religious affiliation[1]. Quota sampling is a sampling technique that targets a population of interest.

Research process for the 5th Children Study



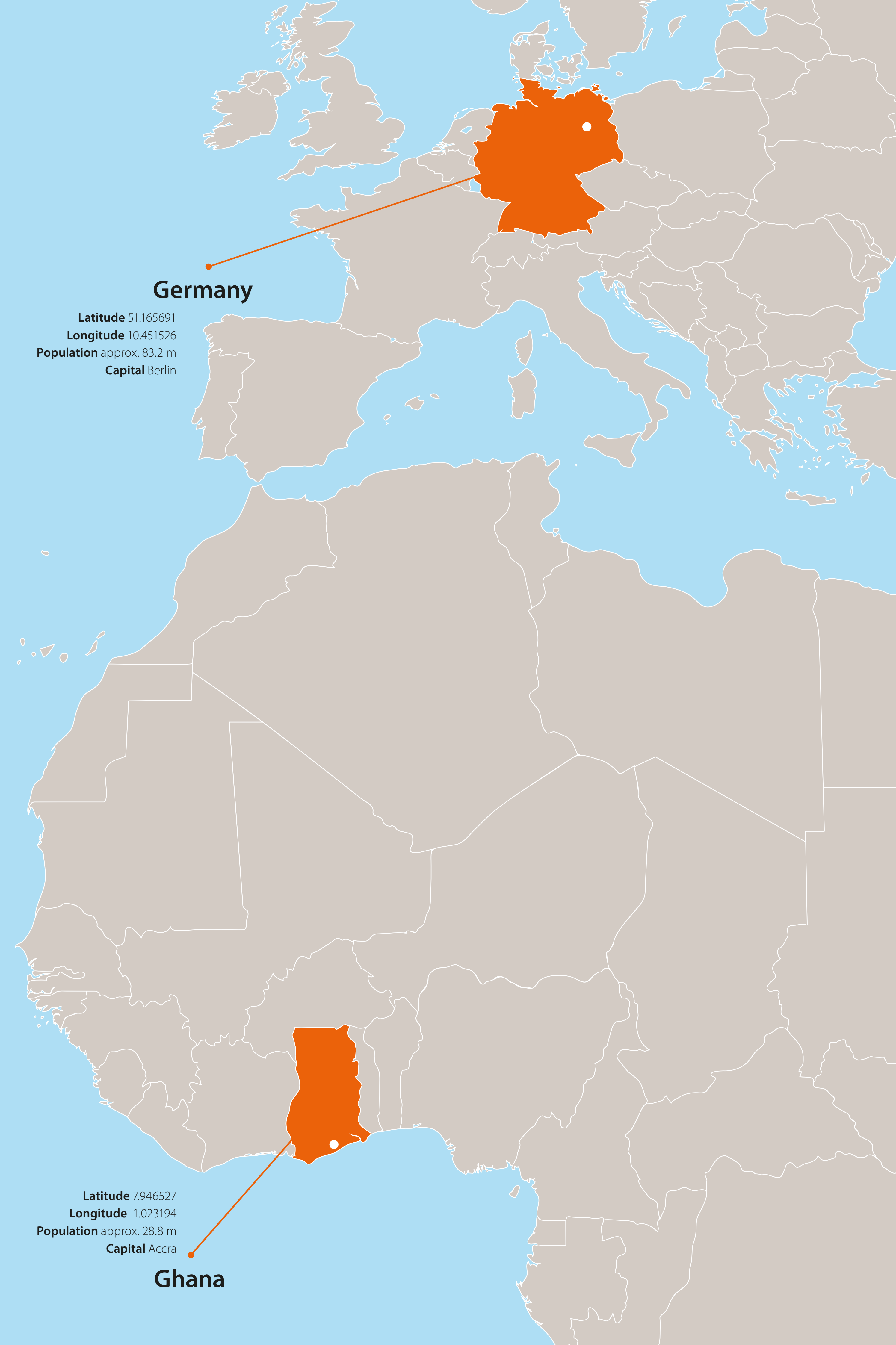
1 In Germany, the regional distribution is based on the selection framework provided by Arbeitskreis Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforschungsinstitute GmbH (ADM) and is based on an area sample covering all populated areas of Germany. The nets are extracted by ADM and made available to Ipsos as an ADM member. The survey was based on 150 sampling points. In Ghana, the study is based on a multi-level, stratified, randomized sampling method covering a proportional distribution of the sample (N=2,500) across all the regions of Ghana.

In quota sampling, the composition of the sample is determined by defining quota characteristics. The distribution of these characteristics was determined based on their prevalence in the total population, e.g., proportion of children with a 'migration background' in Germany, or proportion of children of a specific ethnicity in Ghana.

After the data had been gathered, they were weighted[2] to adjust the demographic structures in the actual sample to the specifications provided by official statistics and to compensate for normal variations as a result of different selection factors for the individual sample elements. The comparators used were age, gender, region, 'migration background' (Germany) or ethnicity (Ghana), and religious affiliation. The age groups 6–9 years, 10–13 years and 14–16 years were each weighted separately to be representative with regard to the above-described characteristics and, hence, comparable with each other. The target figures for Germany were taken from the microcensus conducted by the Federal Statistical Office. Published official statistics were used for Ghana.

The collected data were first subjected to a descriptive analysis that outputs results including, among others, the frequency of parameters or the location of data (e.g., in the form of mean values). In addition, Ipsos also conducted a multivariate regression analysis. This is a statistical analysis method that examines whether relationships exist between a dependent variable, e.g., religious tolerance, and one or more independent variables, e.g., religiosity or social class affiliation. Multivariate regression allows to examine more than one variable at the same time. Unlike descriptive methods, it allows us to describe causal relationships between variables.

2 The standard weighting method used by Ipsos is IPF (iterative proportional fitting according to Deming) weighting from the Quantum program package. Using this weighting method, the actual distribution of the sample was successively adjusted to the specified target numbers of the weighting variables. For this purpose, a specific weighting factor was calculated for each cell, which was calculated using the ratio of actual and target figures. The thus calculated weighting factors provided the basis for adjusting the subsequent characteristic. This calculation was an iterative process and carried out until all variables had eventually been adjusted to the specified target numbers.



04. Religious affiliation and beliefs

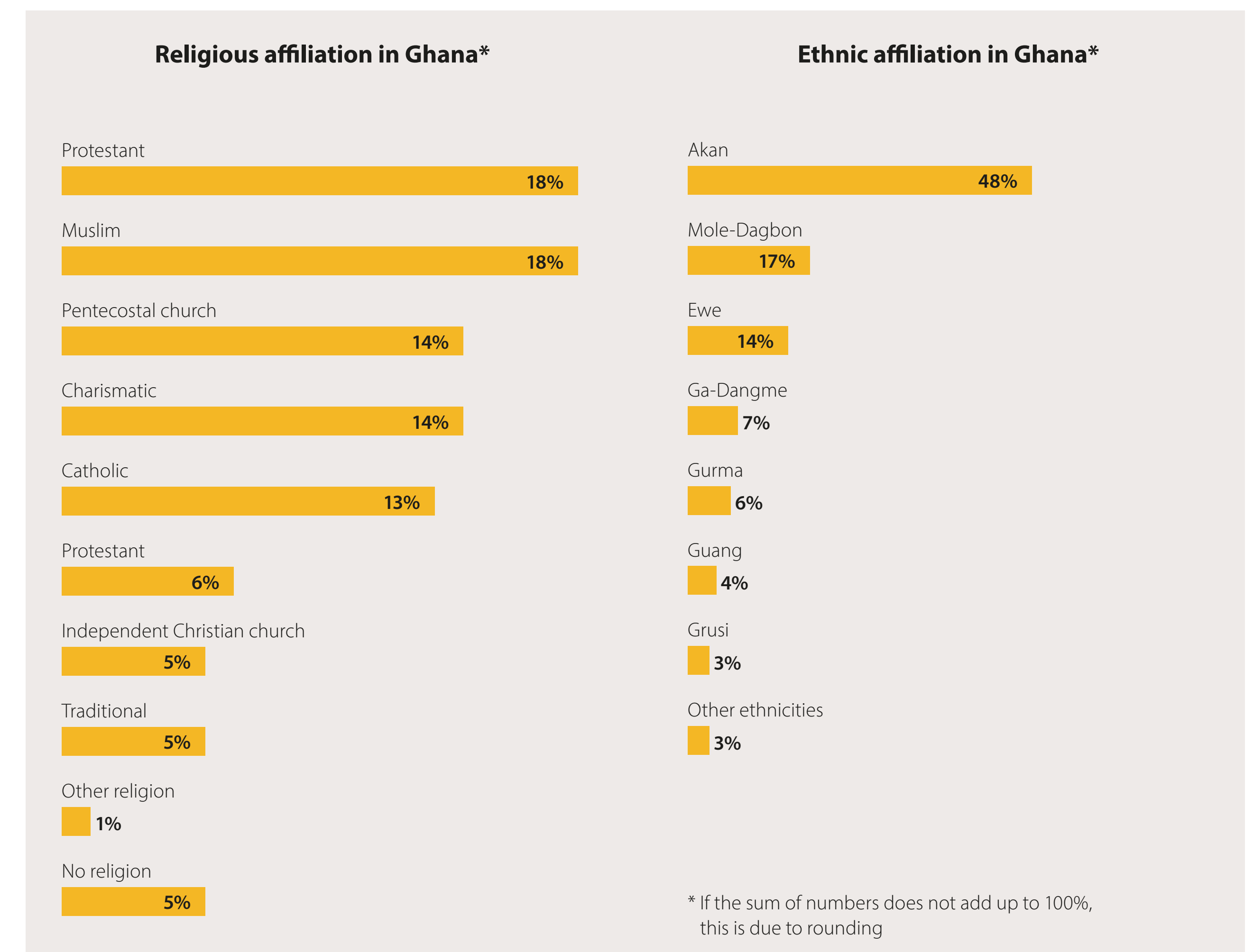
Photo: dreamstime.com

The study sample reflects the diverse life worlds of the children surveyed in the two countries, which bring them into contact with members of a wide variety of origins, and thereby approximates the distribution of these origin groups in the general society:

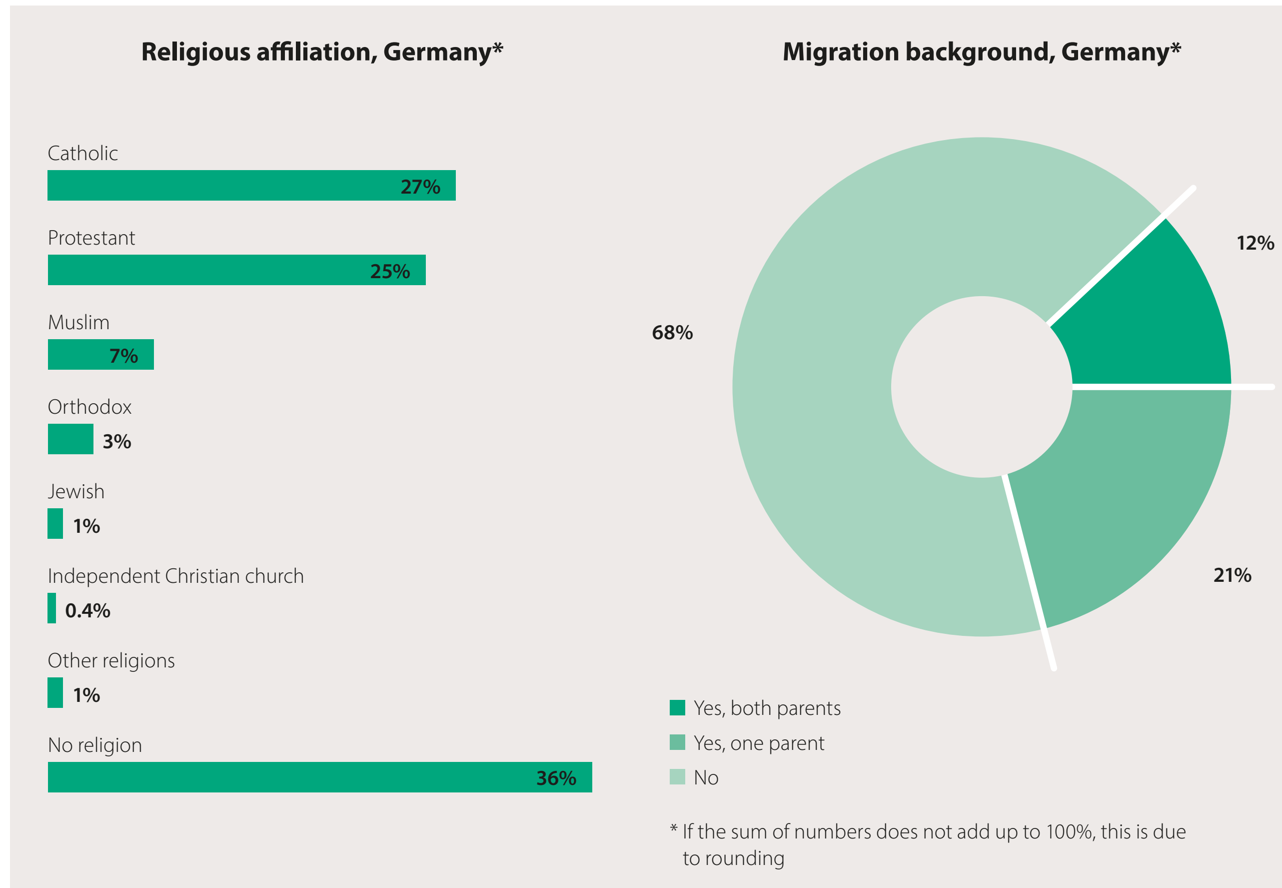
At 18% each, most of the children interviewed in Ghana identified as Protestant or Muslim. Others identify as Pentecostal, Catholic, Charismatic, Protestant, members of an independent Christian church, or following an indigenous ('traditional') religion. 5% of the children interviewed in Ghana said they were not affiliated with a religion, but as shown below, this should not be equated with atheism. In terms of ethnicity, half of the children interviewed were Akan (the largest ethnic group in Ghana), followed by Mole-Dagbon, Ewe, Ga-Dangme, Gurma, Guang, Grusi, and several smaller groups.

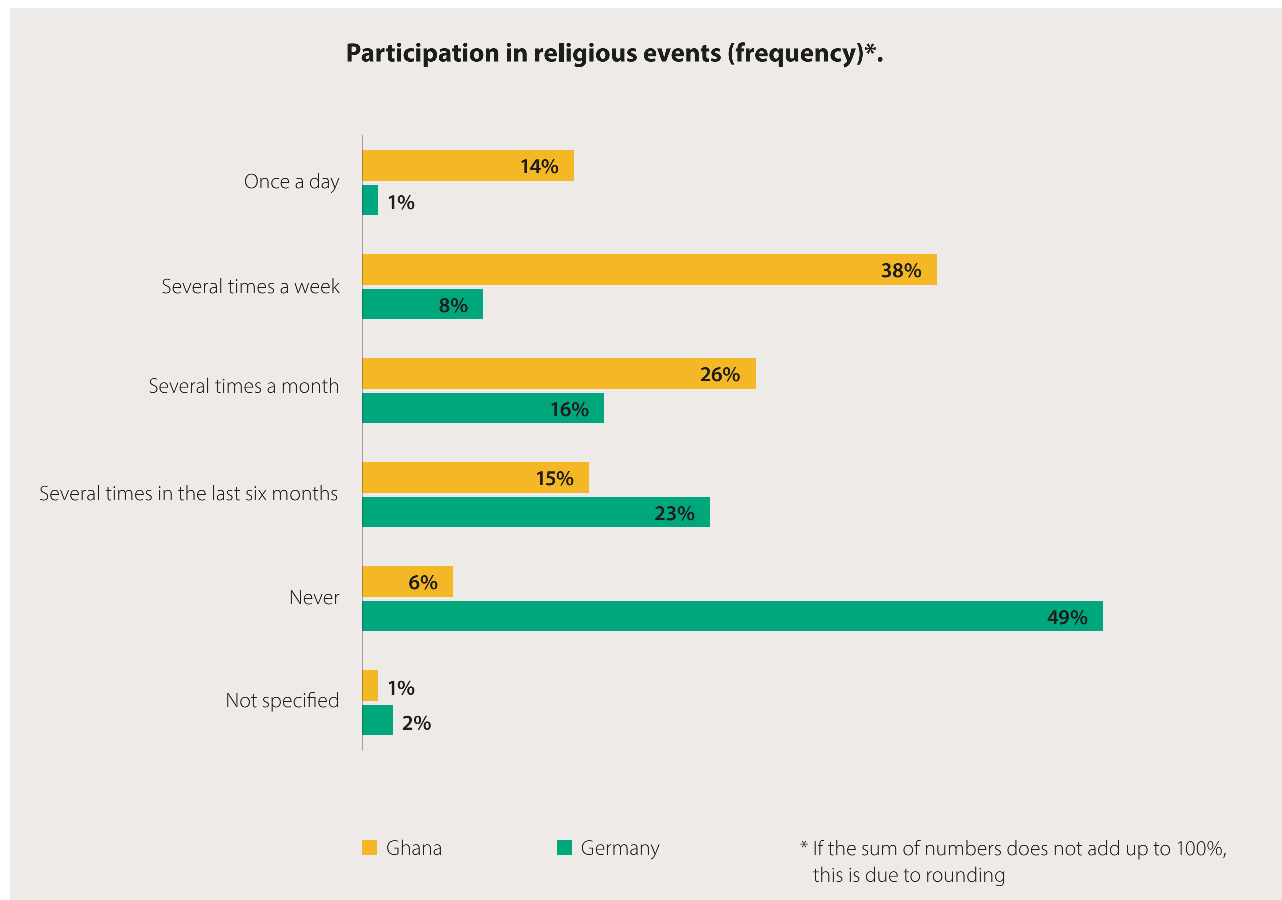
It was also very important for us to interview children from different religious backgrounds in Germany. 36% of the children surveyed in Germany are not affiliated with a religion. 27% identify as Catholic, 25% as Protestant and 7% as Muslim. Other smaller religious groups include the Orthodox Church, Judaism and independent Christian churches. Partially overlapping with religious affiliation, we also defined a so-called 'migration background' (at least one parent born in a foreign country) as a quota characteristic, whereby both characteristics—religion and migration—were based on the distribution in the overall population.

In 12% of the interviewed children both parents have a 'migration background', i.e. both parents were born in a foreign country. In 21% of children, one parent was born in a foreign country (total of 33% vs. 68%[3] without a 'migration background'). The parents of the surveyed children having a 'migration background' are mostly from Poland, Turkey, Russia, Syria, Italy and Romania.



3 If the sum of numbers does not add up to 100%, this is due to rounding





Faith and religious practices of children

In addition to being an official member of a religious community, religiosity is established in everyday life by engaging in religious practices. These practices, on the one hand, can vary greatly in terms of form, execution and intensity and, on the other hand, can have different meanings for different persons.

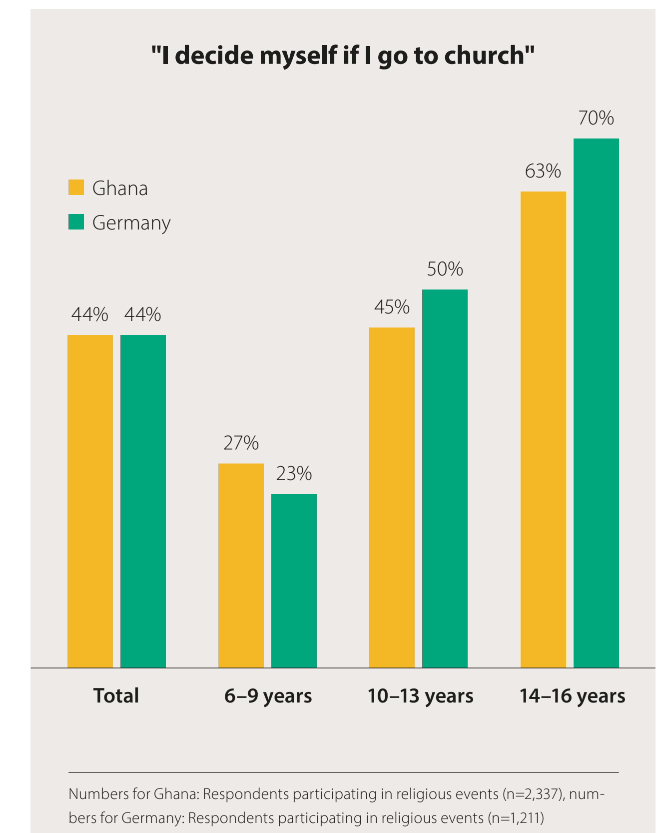
Because religion plays a greater role in everyday life in Ghana (as explained above), the children surveyed in Ghana generally attend more religious events than children in Germany. Two out of five children (38%) in Ghana attend several religious events a week. In Germany, this is the case for only 8% of children. One in four children (26%) in Ghana say they attend an event several times a month. In Germany, on the other hand, the percentage is only 16%. A frequency of "several times in the last six months" was reported by only 15% of children in Ghana, but by 23% of children in Germany. The percentage of children in Ghana who never participate in religious events is very low (6%). By contrast, almost half of the children in Germany (49%) say they never attend religious events.

Among the different religious groups, we found that Muslim children participate in religious events more often than children of other religions, both in Ghana and in Germany. Almost one-third (30%) of Muslim children in Ghana attend an event every day. This share is just under a quarter (24%) for Protestant children. In Germany, 8% of Muslim children attend a religious event once a day. Almost half (47%) of the children who are Muslim in Ghana attend a religious event several times a week, vs. 21% in Germany. Also among those who attend an event several times a month, it is the Muslim children who make up the largest share in Germany, at more than one-third (35%). In the response group "several times in the last six months," Orthodox children are the most strongly represented group, accounting for 63%.

With regard to the practice of religion by children and adolescents, the question frequently comes up whether children do this of their own free will or at the request of their families. While the family as an instance of socialization plays a big role, in that religious practices and routines are embedded, in part, in the "family habitus" (Ecarius 2013: 64). our data show, that this does not mean that children would principally attend religious events at the instigation of their parents only. Many children in both countries said in this study that they can decide independently. In the in-depth interviews, children often said they go to church of their own free will, but are aware that their parents welcome it, such as 15-year-old Anna from Germany, who goes to an independent Christian church:

> *“Well, I would say that my mum would be relatively relaxed if I’d say I don’t want to go to church today or on Sunday. She would let me stay home. So it’s not like I’d be forced to go to church. But I think it makes her happy if I come with at least once a month.”*
>
> (Germany, Anna, girl, 15 years old, independent Christian church)

Our quantitative data show that there are no significant differences between Ghana and Germany in terms of the influence parents exert on their children's attendance of church services.



Numbers for Ghana: Respondents participating in religious events (n=2,337), numbers for Germany: Respondents participating in religious events (n=1,211)

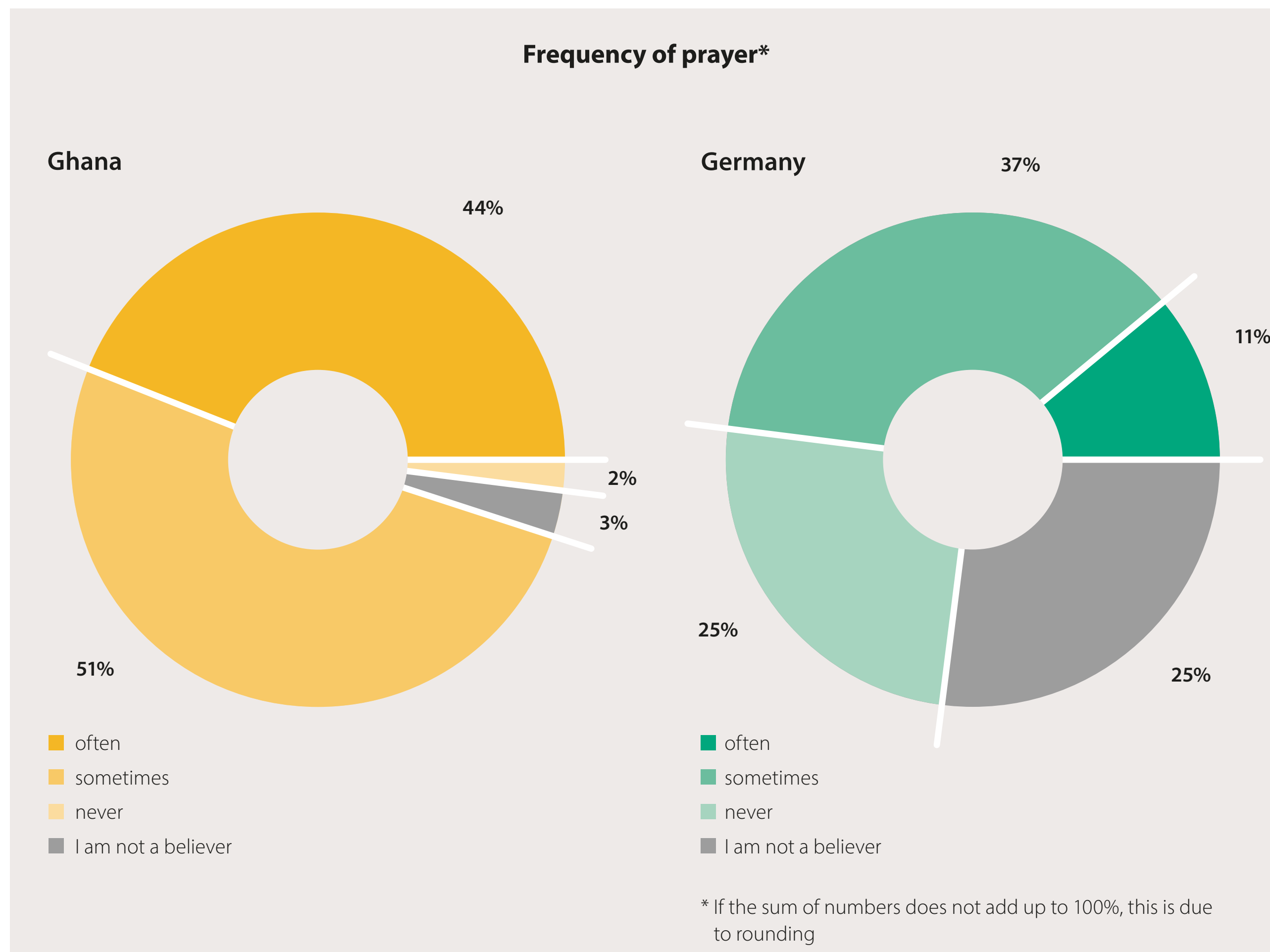
44% of children in both countries say that they can independently decide if they want to go to church. In both countries, children are more likely to make the decision on their own the older they are.

More than half of the Muslim children in Ghana (55%) are allowed to decide for themselves whether or not they want to attend a religious event. This is a significantly larger percentage than in other religious groups. In Germany, on the other hand, Muslim (66%) and Orthodox (64%) children are more often instructed by their parents to attend religious events than children of other religions. This result indicates that specific parenting styles should not be attributed to a religion, but are influenced by the cultural and life context of families. The stronger influence of Muslim and Orthodox parents in Germany on their children's attendance of religious services is also attributed to the fact that many of them have a 'migration background' and that attendance of religious services is also important for them to keep their ethnic identity or is connected to their socio-economic level.

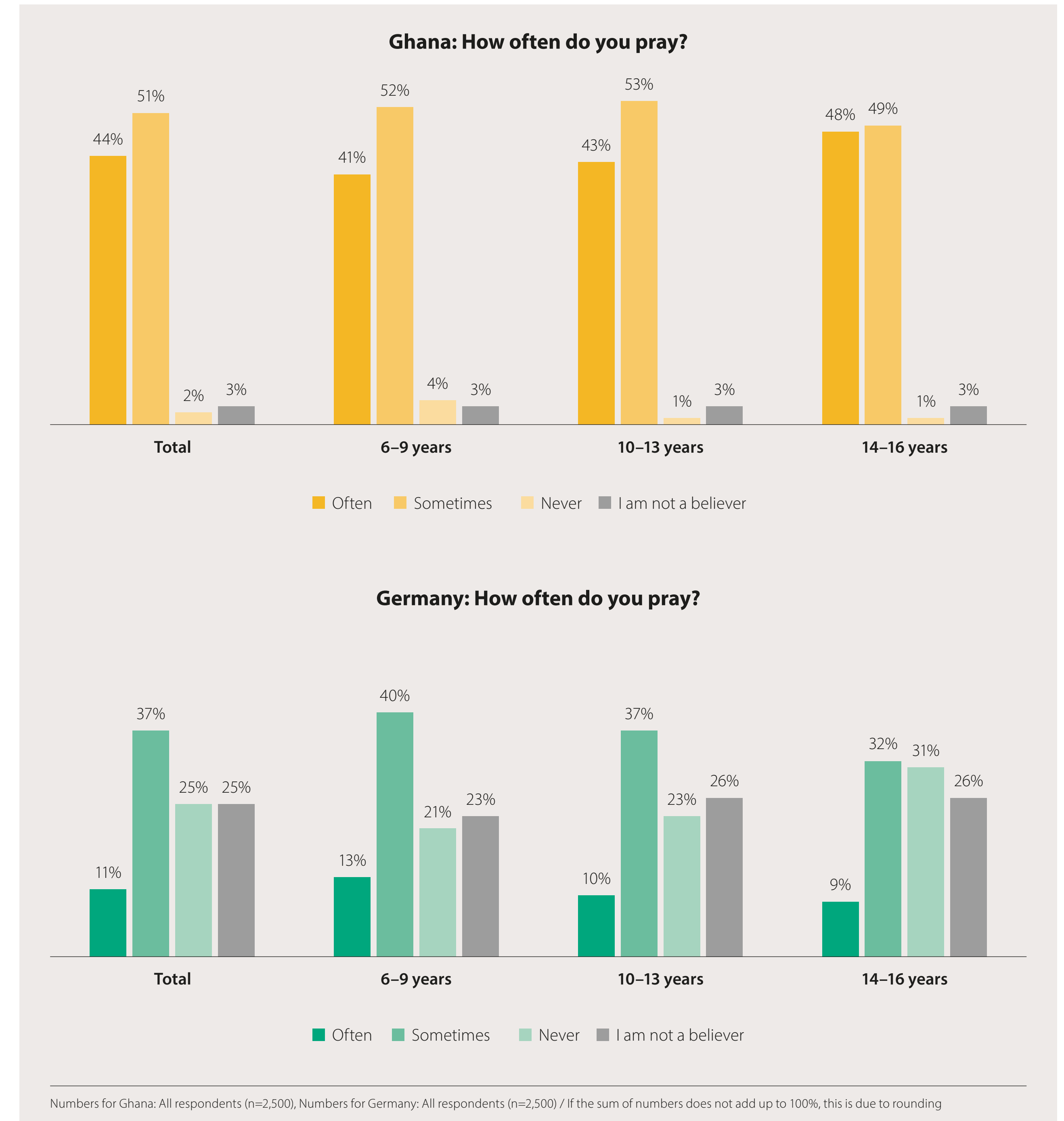
Ritualised prayer

In addition to religious services, prayer is another religious practice that is highly significant for many children in terms of their emotional religious affiliation. Children in Ghana pray more often than those in Germany. While 44% of children in Ghana say that they pray frequently, it is only 11% of children in Germany who say that. Another 51% of children in Ghana pray occasionally, while this answer is only provided by 37% of the children surveyed in Germany. The combined share of children in Ghana who never pray or are non-believers is very low (5%) and is similar across all faiths.

In Germany, a quarter of the respondents say that they never pray (25%) or that they are non-believers (25%). 31% of Protestant children, 25% of Orthodox children, 21% of Catholic children and smaller shares of children of other religions never pray. Children who are not part of a religion were by far the largest group who said that they never pray. Nevertheless, 3% of them still say that the pray often or occasionally.



* If the sum of numbers does not add up to 100%, this is due to rounding



Numbers for Ghana: All respondents (n=2,500), Numbers for Germany: All respondents (n=2,500) / If the sum of numbers does not add up to 100%, this is due to rounding

Comparing the quantitative data across the different religions, we see that Muslim children pray more often than the children of other religions in both countries. In Ghana, almost three quarters (72%) of the Muslim children and half (50%) of the Catholic children say that they pray frequently. In Germany, almost half (49%) of the Muslim children pray frequently. In the German context, this number is only surpassed by children who are part of independent Christian churches (58%) or Judaism (52%).

The fact that children in Ghana pray more often than children in Germany may be explained by the greater importance of religion in Ghanaian public life, as a result of which communal prayer is embedded in many areas of everyday life, e.g. at school, during leisure time or at family gatherings. Prayer can also be related to a deeper personal religiosity of the children. Information about the extent to which children develop/have a relationship with God by praying, can also be obtained by asking them about free prayer and conversations with God.

Photo: World Vision

Free prayer and conversations with God

Our in-depth interviews already shown us that asking about prayer routines or the frequency of prayer only provides limited information about children's religious practices. "Prayer" to some children means ritualised prayer only, which some of them cannot do by themselves because they are unable to recite prayer verses from memory. If children say that they rarely or never pray, this may lead us to overlook their free prayers, or as they often put it, their "conversations with God" or "thoughts of God" in our research.

We therefore also asked questions about conversations with God in addition to prayer practices in our quantitative survey. A good third (34%) of children in Ghana frequently seek a conversation with God outside of prayer. More than half (53%) of children in Ghana sometimes talk to God, while only 12% never turn to God. In Germany, 44% of children turn to God, but only 6% do so frequently. In contrast, more than half (53%) of children in Germany never speak to God. With regard to differences between the religions, Muslim children in both countries frequently say that they often talk to God (59% in Ghana, 31% in Germany). In Germany, the same applies to children from independent Christian churches (52%) and children of Jewish faith (46%). 4% of children from Germany who do not belong to a religion say that they talk to God often or sometimes. Interestingly, this also applies to almost half (49%) of the children from Ghana who are not part of a religion. We can therefore assume that a significant share of children in Ghana without a religious affiliation entertain an independent relationship with God through own conversations with God, even if the religious rituals of the faith communities are not accessible or personally meaningful to them.

05. Interfaith contacts and tolerance

Photo: World Vision

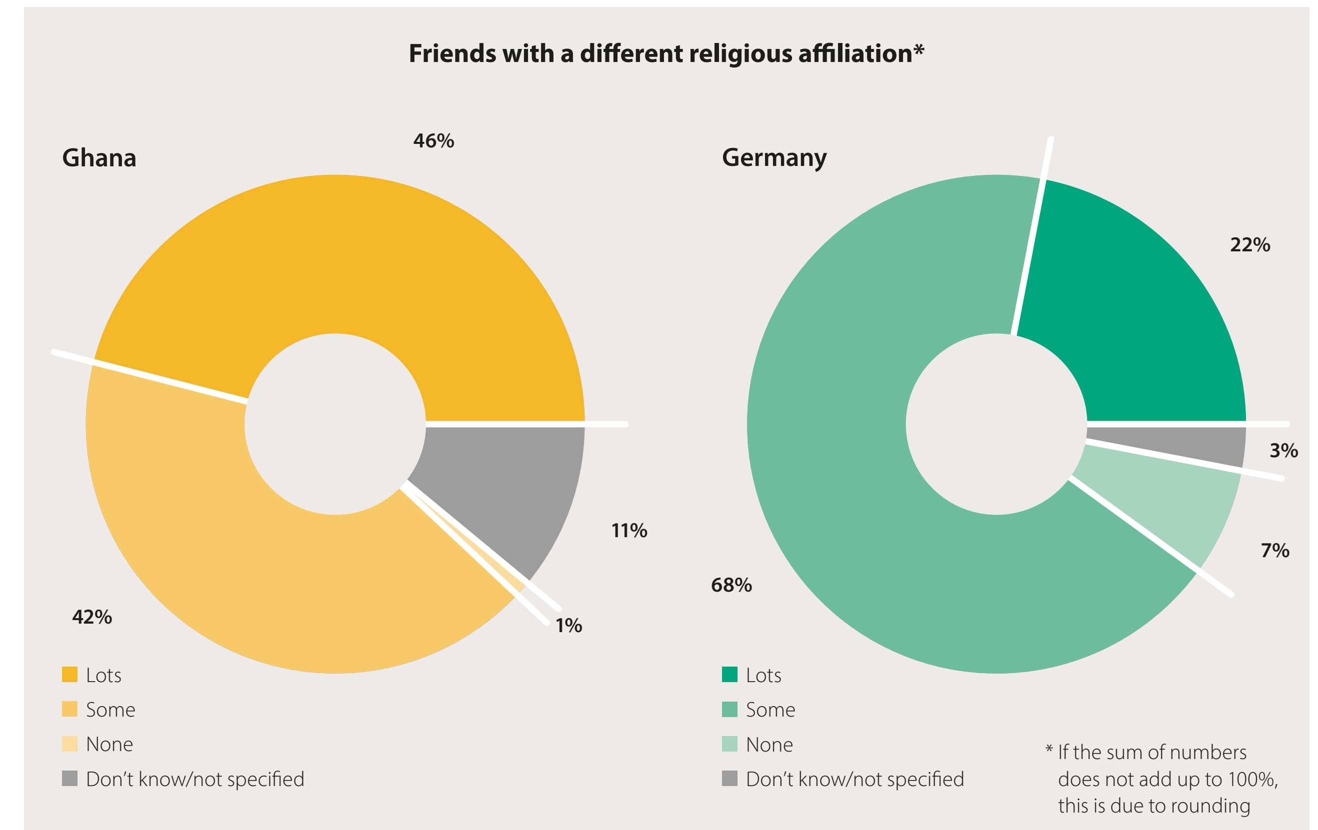
Interfaith contacts and friendships

In both Germany and Ghana, the question of coexistence of people of different faiths is of particular—albeit different—importance. Only very few children do not have friendships with children from other faith communities (so-called "cross-friendships"). "Cross-friendships" (Quillian/Campbell 2003; Rose/Hospital 2016; also Badhwar 1993: 2–3; Bilecen 2014: 5–6) is the term used for contacts between children across group affiliations such as faith groups. A precondition for this is that contact opportunities are available, but when they are, little stands in the way of interfaith friendships, as already shown in the 4th World Vision Children's Study (2018: 31) and in our study on religion as a source of resilience.

In Ghana, 46% of children have many friends with a different religious affiliation than their own. Another 42% have children in their circle of friends who come from a different faith community.

In particular, children in Ghana with a traditional faith (55%) as well as Muslim children (52%) have many friends with a different religious affiliation. In Ghana, one in two children (50%) living in a household with limited socio-economic resources say they have many friends from other faith communities. This is significantly more than for children whose parents are financially better off (37%), which may also be the result of them going to private, faith-based schools. This becomes obvious, for example, in our interview with thirteen-year-old Elizabeth from Ghana, who belongs to an independent Christian church, comes from the urban middle class in the north of the country and says that she gets in touch with Christian children only.

> ***Interviewer:*** *Ok do you have friends that belong to other religions or classmates that belong to other religions?*
> ***Elizabeth:*** *No.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *Ok so you don't have Muslim friends?*
> ***Elizabeth:*** *Yes. [...]*
> ***Interviewer:*** *So why don't you have some friends that are Muslims?*
> ***Elizabeth:*** *Because they don't live around me.*
>
> (Ghana, Elizabeth, girl, 13 years old, independent Christian church)



Many of the children interviewed in Ghana possess are knowledgeable about the religious affiliation of their friends and familiar with the beliefs and practices of other religions. Children in Ghana often speak with pride about their interfaith contacts and see them as an opportunity to learn about other religions. Bless, a 15-year-old protestant, for example, explains that he can acquire important skills through his friendship with Muslim children. Knowing how to behave appropriately in other cultural and religious contexts could help him later in life, for example, if he were to live in a different place.

“I think it can have a positive impact on my life. As in, when I’m old and I’m being posted to a place of another religion and know nothing about them I can refer to my young age and remember all the things I know about that religion and also how to behave and how to avoid any trouble.”

(Ghana, Bless, boy, 15 years old, protestant)

It is rather unusual for the Ghanaian context that Christian or Muslim children say they are friends with children following 'traditional religions', as these are stigmatized in many contexts. Nevertheless, fifteen-year-old Tiana, for example, who belongs to an evangelical church, shows the same appreciation and interest for children with traditional beliefs as she does for her Muslim friends. However, her statement suggests that traditional rituals are less openly shared, which is why she lacks knowledge of them. In the following quote she speaks about differences in the mode of worship.

“The mode of worship [is] for them [Muslims] they pray to God only five times but we, the Christians, we pray incessantly. Yes, but for the Traditionalist like this, they pour libation. I don’t know how to do such things, so maybe when he comes then he tells us what he did during the weekends and we also listen to him.”

(Ghana, Tiana, girl, 15 years old, Evangelical)

Religiously and socially heterogeneous life worlds are less common in Germany than in Ghana, which is explained mainly by the social segregation of residential areas and schools. In Germany, more than one in five children (22%) say that they have many friends from a different faith community. More than 2 in three children (68%) have at least some children in their circle of friends who come from a different religious background.

In Germany, it tends to rather be the children from middle-class households who find themselves in a diverse religious environment. For example, one in four children (26%) at this social level indicated having many friends from a different faith environment. This is significantly more than for children from households with a (very) low socioeconomic status (13%) or with a high socioeconomic status (19%). In addition, we see a difference between the west and the east of Germany. Children growing up in the eastern German states have relatively little contact with children from other religious communities. For example, about one in six children (17%) say they have no friends at all who have a different religion. This is significantly more than in the west of Germany, where the percentage is 4%.

All of the religious minority children surveyed in the in-depth interviews in Germany have interfaith friendships. For Noam, a twelve-year-old Jewish boy, it is absolutely normal to be friends with children of other religions, since his parents also have friendships with Christians.

"We have many friends who are Christian. And we see them on a regular basis. My mother's best friend is from Greece. She is also a Catholic. We see them on the weekends, and we do things together on a regular basis."

(Germany, Noam, boy, 12 years old, Jewish)

Fourteen-year-old Muslim Kerem, whose family belongs to the metropolitan lower middle class, shares the following about his friends' religious affiliations:

Interviewer: *When you think about your friends, do you actually know if they also have a religion?*
Kerem: *Yes. Most of my friends are also with Islam. But I also have Christian friends.*
Interviewer: *How do you actually know that they are Christian or follow Islam? Is this something you talk about?*
Kerem: *Yes, sometimes we talk about it. Or sometimes you just find out – during Ramadan—if a friend of mine is not fasting and I ask him why are you not fasting, and then he’d just say "I am a Christian" or something like that. Then I would find out. Something like that.*

(Germany, Kerem, boy, 14 years old, Muslim)

Similar to what the children in Ghana say, different religious rituals serve as identifiers of a religious affiliation for Kerem, to which he otherwise attaches little importance in his friendships.

Value concepts and tolerance of people with different faiths and beliefs

Even though religion plays a very different role in everyday life in Germany than in Ghana, with over a third of the children in Germany saying they do not believe in God at all, there is a great deal of agreement on values and concepts regarding how people should treat each other. The paramount value for all children (97% Ghana, 95% Germany) is that one should help others in need. These are values, which—in the form of emergency aid, philantropy or charitable giving—have a high value in religions, but also shape secular worldviews.

The main differences between the values of children in Germany and in Ghana concern how they see those who are older than they and the role reprimands/corrections play in their social life. The social position of those who are older (meaning children, who are older) is also reflected in the upbringing of those who are younger, which can include punishment. Educational interventions are seen as helping to improve the behaviour of those who are younger and legitimized by the supposedly superior knowledge of those who are older (Ibrahim/ Komulainen 2016: 61 with reference to Imoh 2013: 482).

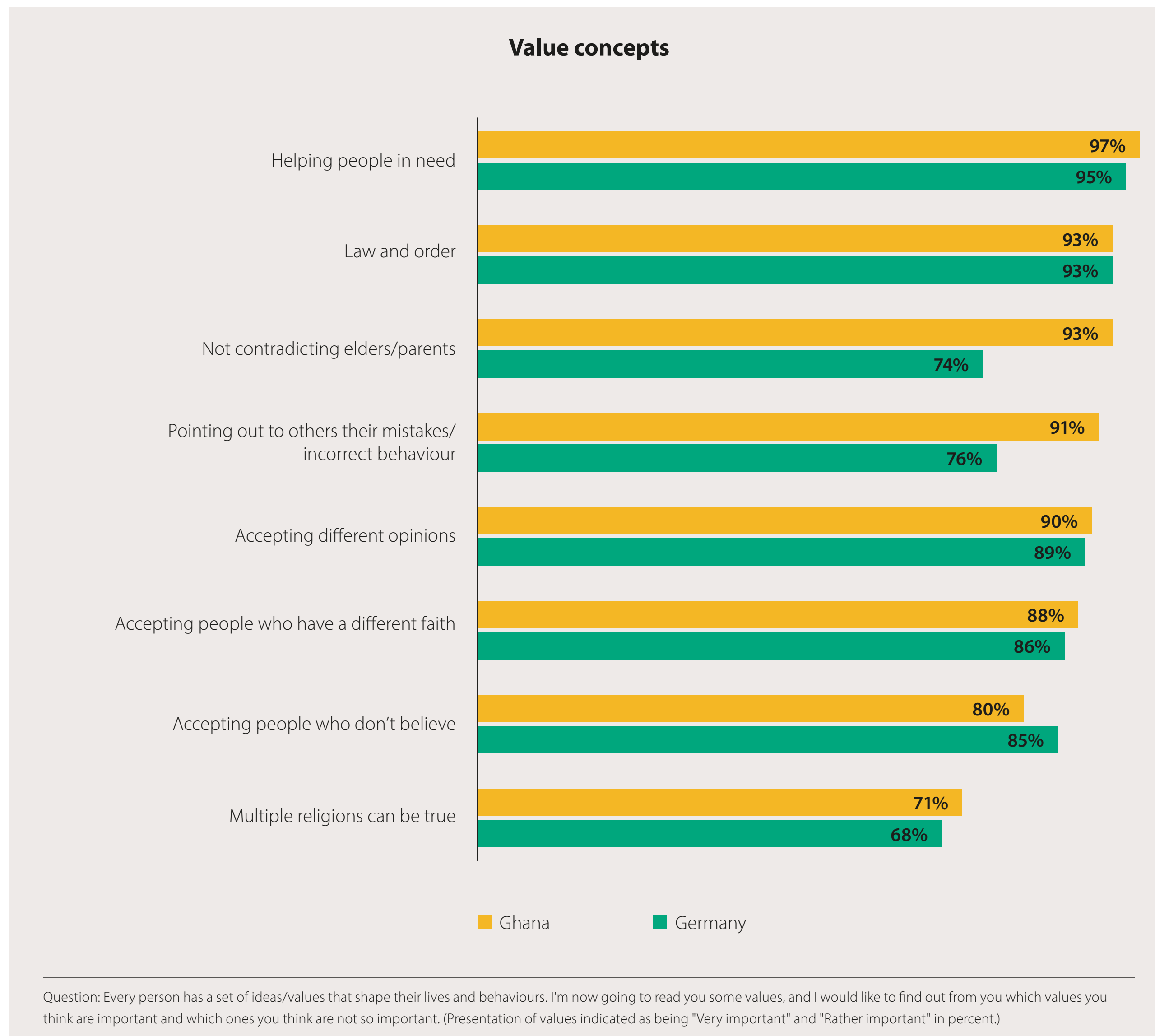
Even if these aspects are not so important for children in Germany, many of them nevertheless agree with the statements that those who are older should not be contradicted or their faults be exposed. It suggests that both Ghana and Germany are societies in which adultism prevails, and in which there is a certain imbalance of power between older children or adults and younger people based on age categories, and where people, who are older, can exert a power and control, especially through upbringing practices.

Additional, minor differences are obvious from the fact that atheism is accepted less in Ghana, while other faiths and beliefs are accepted more. The concept that multiple religions could possibly hold truth is also expressed more by children in Ghana than by those in Germany.

Religious tolerance

With regard to attitudes toward the members of other religions, the data from the standardized survey show that many children in Ghana seem to apply contradictory interpretations: While they agree with statements of exclusivity, they also consider religions to be essentially equivalent, or at least similar. Three in five (60%) children in Ghana agree with the statement that their respective religion is the best, and 43% agree with the statement that others should convert to their religion. 58% say that the religions share similar values. 61% of the children interviewed believe that God will punish those with a different faith in the afterlife. Here, agreement is similarly distributed among all religious groups and is lowest among children following traditional religions (49%).

In the context of the qualitative survey, children from Ghana also answered the question of whether God would punish those who do not have the right faith. In most cases, however, the children provided contradictory interpretations, assuming an equivalence of the religions, thereby challenging the punishment narrative. Eleven-year-old Muslim girls IS from Ghana, for example, says: “they are human beings and we are also human beings. We come from



Question: Every person has a set of ideas/values that shape their lives and behaviours. I'm now going to read you some values, and I would like to find out from you which values you think are important and which ones you think are not so important. (Presentation of values indicated as being "Very important" and "Rather important" in percent.)

one place but we are from different tribes. So we have to respect other religions and not only ours." This makes it clear that this interpretation—the peaceful coexistence of equivalent religions—is a way for them to take a stand against religious conversion, which is a relevant topic in the Ghanaian context: "you have to live peacefully in your religion and not someone else's religion." A similar explanation is given by AJW, a thirteen-year-old Protestant:

> *"They say that we will go to hell and all those things. And I always say all of us are worshipping the same God. [...] Because I can say the Quran and the Bible they are the same [...]"*
>
> (Ghana, AJW, girl, 13 years old, Protestant)

Bless, a fifteen-year-old Protestant, resolves the question of equality of Christianity and Islam or the differences between them by pointing out differences in practices but stating that both believe on one God.

> ***Bless:*** *"Mostly in our class we argue about the Prophet Mohammed and Jesus. So we still don't know who is the best before this ever came but I think they are all good. They follow the same person, God, and I think that is their belief and I also have my belief. So we also have different beliefs."*
> ***Interviewer:*** *"Ok so what do you think are some of the similarities between the two religions?"*
> ***Bless:*** *"Mostly we have the Bible and they also have the Holy Quran. So, they mostly go to the Mosque and we go to the Church. They go on Friday and we go on Saturday. Is either Saturday or Sunday but is mostly on Sunday. And their festivals are way different from ours. So I think we have different faith."*
> ***Interviewer:*** *"Ok."*
> ***Bless:*** *"But we follow the same person."*
>
> (Ghana, Bless, boy, 15 years old, Protestant)

The statistical data from Germany show that the idea of punishment of those with different beliefs in the afterlife is much less widespread and is affirmed by only 15% of children. Germany, there is a more pronounced difference between religions and denominations. Higher than average agreement is expressed by children who are members of an independent Christian denomination (33%), by Jewish children (33%), and by Muslim children (59%) (although Jewish and Muslim children also have many more interfaith friendships, see above). Very few children in Germany rate their faith as being superior (9%), and they are not interested in converting other people to their faith (6%). More than half (53%) of children in Germany see many similarities between the religions. Fourteen-year-old Muslim Kerem for example says:

> *"Well, there's a lot that's similar. It's just that there are some small things that you're not allowed to do in one religion while you're allowed to do them in another. But by and large, it's the same–I think. [...] Take Jesus, for example. We also have him in Islam. And for example–in the Bible–I believe–it says that you should be accepting of all people. Islam says the same. That all are welcome."*
>
> (Germany, Kerem, boy, 14 years old, Muslim)

In terms of religious tolerance, most of the children interviewed in Germany in the context of the qualitative survey agree that religion and faith are a personal choice or 'passed-on' and should not be up for debate. They emphasize acceptance of religion and freedom of faith as a significant value:

> *"When someone else believes in somebody else, I think that's important, too. We shouldn't argue about it. Everybody should be able to believe in whomever he or she wants."*
>
> (Germany, Vanessa, girl, 12 years old, Catholic)

> *"People have different beliefs. Christians may not look at Judaism or at Muslims that way. They don't agree with it in the same was as they do with their own religion. Just as Muslims don't agree with Christianity. Everybody has a different opinion. [...] It's that you are born into your faith, or something like that. Or you start believing at some point, because you read a lot or something like that. And if you stand by your beliefs and defend them, then that's OK. But you should not talk bad of other faiths. Because each faith also has its good sides."*
>
> (Germany, Peter, boy, 16 years old, Greek-Orthodox)

> *"Human is human. It's not their fault that they are Christians. Just as it is not my fault that I am Muslim."*
>
> (Germany, Natasha, girl, 13 years old, Muslim)

When comparing the in-depth interviews of children from Ghana and Germany, we find that they agree in calling for peaceful coexistence, although their reasons for demanding religious tolerance are different. Children in Ghana explore different practices and beliefs more closely, they are highly knowledgeable about their own and other religions, and religion has a more existential value for them. For children in Ghana, religious tolerance results from the equality of religions or even the equality as a result of believing in the one God.

In contrast, most children in Germany make no reference to religious practices or beliefs in the interviews and hardly consider what differentiates and what unites the different faiths. For many children in Germany, religion also has less of a personal relevance and less significance for their social contacts. For them, religious tolerance derives predominantly from the right to freedom of faith, and from the fact that the practice of religion is guaranteed by law.

On the relationship between religiosity and religious tolerance

Our data indicate that, while children in Ghana are more aware of and agree more with a hierarchy system for religions, they also have more interfaith friendships. As a result of these seemingly contradictory findings, we chose to take an even closer look at religiosity and religious tolerance in this study. A regression analysis was conducted in order to examine how personal and family religiosity is associated with attitudes toward other religious groups. Other factors potentially impacting religious tolerance (e.g. region, age of the child, gender of the child, 'migration background', household size, and socioeconomic status), were included in the model as control variables, and tested.

In a preparatory step of the regression analysis, a factor for "religious tolerance" was initially developed from the degree of agreement with the following items, using factor analysis: "Accepting other opinions as well," "Accepting people who believe in something else," "Multiple religions can be true," and "Accepting people who do not believe."

The factor was coded in a way to make higher scores reflect greater religious tolerance. Since factors, in terms of absolute values, tend to have a difficult-to-interpret mean value of 0, an additional index was formed for the initial comparison of mean values between Germany and Ghana based on the four items strongly correlated with the factor. This index ranges between 1 (very low religious tolerance) and 4 (very high religious tolerance). The centre of this scale is 2.5. For Ghana, the mean value for religious tolerance is 3.4, and for Germany 3.2. This means that the religious tolerance of the children surveyed in both countries is in the upper range of the scale and generally high. A t-test was used to test and compare the significance of the mean values between the two countries. Since this is the case ($p < .001$), we can conclude that children in Ghana have slightly more religious tolerance than children in Germany.

Next, the original factor (religious tolerance) was determined as the dependent variable in a regression model analysing the influence of independent variables (personal religiosity and family/structural religiosity) on religious tolerance in Ghana and in Germany.

Two indices were formed for personal and for family/structural religiosity. Where necessary, the items were inverted so that a high score represented a higher level of religiosity.

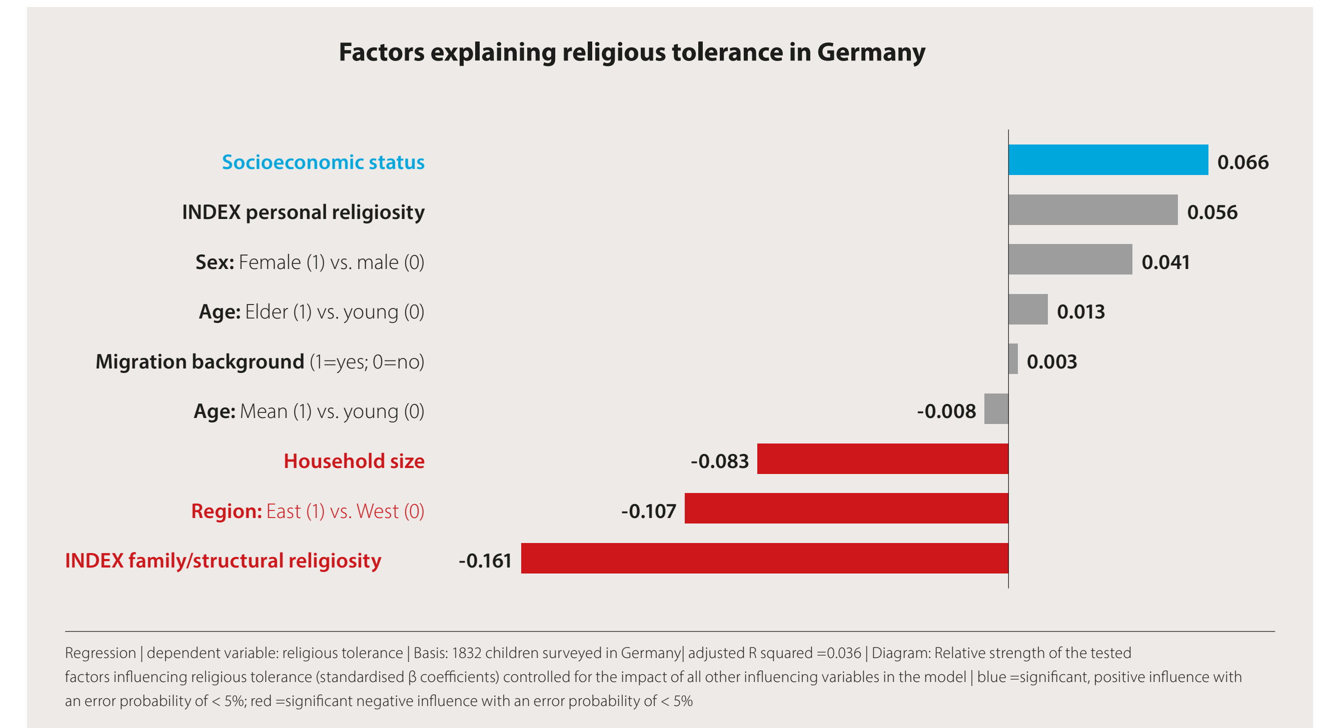
Personal religiosity is composed of the relevance of religion in a person's life, personal belief in God/a higher being, concept of god[4], frequency of independent prayer, frequency of a conversation with God in everyday situations in addition to prayer, and the frequency of attending worship services by choice.

Family/structural religiosity is composed of the presence of a formal religious background of the parents, the importance of religion in the family, the frequency of prayer at the request of parents, the frequency of attending worship at the request of parents.

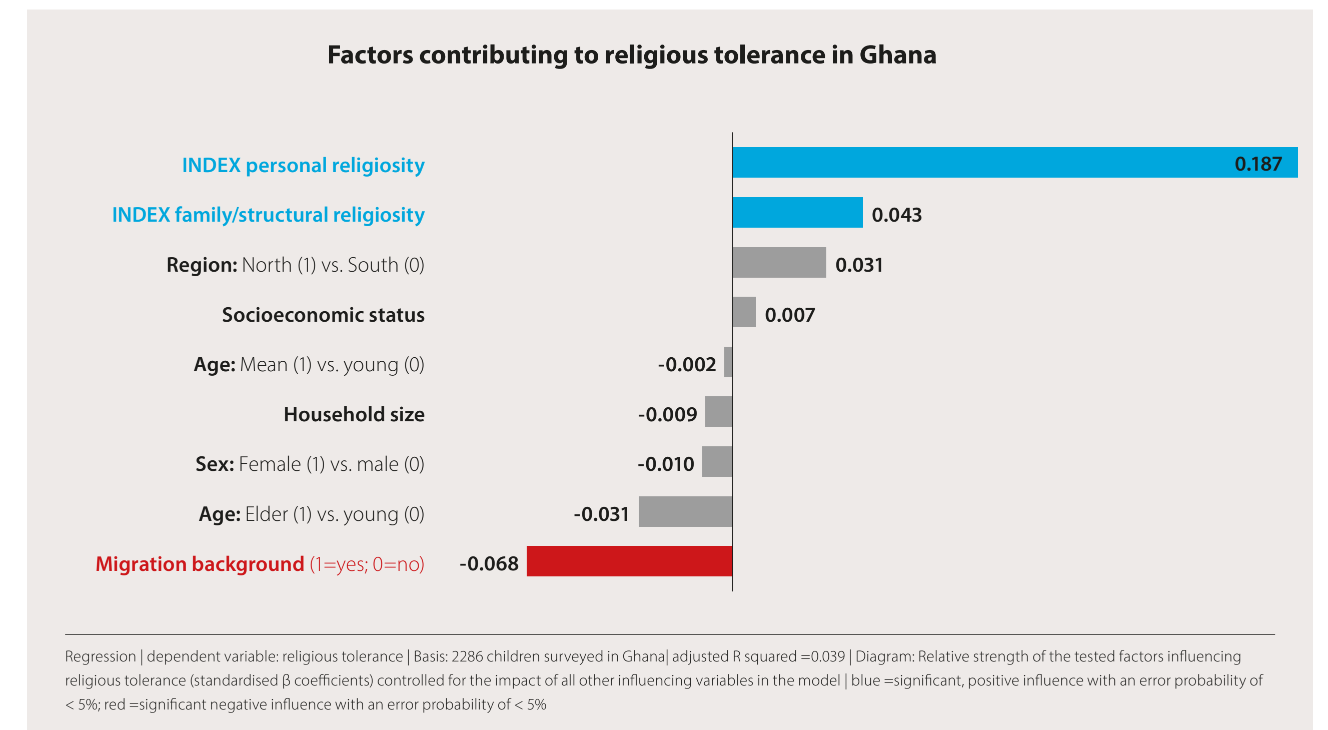
Both indices are reliable. The Cronbach's alpha for personal religiosity is 0.846, and 0.704 for family/structural religiosity. Although the two indices have a relatively high correlation (r=0.666), they did not lead to multicollinearity in the regression models.

The following description of the regression results is limited to statistically significant relationships, i.e., control variables without a significant effect are not included. These correlations are indicated by the standardized regression coefficient, also called beta coefficient, which compares the strength of effect of each variable in comparison to the other variables in the model.

4 This aspect was not presented in more detail in this study due to space constraints.



Regression | dependent variable: religious tolerance | Basis: 1832 children surveyed in Germany| adjusted R squared =0.036 | Diagram: Relative strength of the tested factors influencing religious tolerance (standardised β coefficients) controlled for the impact of all other influencing variables in the model | blue =significant, positive influence with an error probability of < 5%; red =significant negative influence with an error probability of < 5%



Regression | dependent variable: religious tolerance | Basis: 2286 children surveyed in Ghana| adjusted R squared =0.039 | Diagram: Relative strength of the tested factors influencing religious tolerance (standardised β coefficients) controlled for the impact of all other influencing variables in the model | blue =significant, positive influence with an error probability of < 5%; red =significant negative influence with an error probability of < 5%

In the regression model for Ghana, the factor influencing religious tolerance the most is personal religiosity. The higher the personal religiosity of a child, the higher their religious tolerance (β=0.187***[5]). Family/structural religiosity in Ghana therefore has a positive effect on religious tolerance. The higher the family/structural religiosity of a child, the more tolerant it is of other religions (β=0.043*). This means, however, that the effect of family/structural religiosity on tolerance in Ghana is lower than that of personal

5 *** p < 0.001 "highly significant", ** p < 0.01 "very significant", * p < 0.05 "significant"

religiosity. A 'migration background' of parents in Ghana has a slightly negative effect on the religious tolerance of their children (β=-0.068**). If at least one of the child's parents comes from a country other than Ghana, the child tends to be slightly less tolerant. This result is difficult to interpret, and little relevant research is available on persons with a 'migration background' to allow explanations. One can speculate that families with a migration background are not as involved in cultural exchanges between religious groups in Ghana or are shaped by their cultures of origin that have different attitudes toward other religions.

In Germany, personal religiosity has no significant effect on a child's tolerance. In contrast to Ghana, we see: The higher the family/structural religiosity of children, the less tolerant they are of other religions (β=-0,161***). In the German regression model, this is the variable with the strongest effect on the explanation of the dependent variables. This means that the more important religion is in a family's habitus, the less tolerant their children are toward people of other faiths. Since this relationship is the exact opposite in Ghana, am automatic connection between a strong religious family habitus and the rejection of people of other faiths cannot be drawn. One possible explanation for the different approaches may be the different contexts in which these families live. While, for many generations, the Ghanaian society as a whole has had much more interfaith contact, this only applies to specific groups of the German population who experience diversified life worlds. Using the contact hypothesis proposed by Allport (1954) as a basis, long-standing contacts between members of different faith groups or the lack thereof may affect their attitudes in terms of religious tolerance. Likewise, with regard to interfaith contacts, Zimmer and Stein (2022:1) find that the acceptance of diversity among young adults increases the more they interact with people of other faiths in daily life. In addition to religiosity of the family, residential area, household size and socioeconomic status of a household also influence the religious tolerance of children in Germany. The regression analysis also shows that children in eastern Germany are less tolerant than those in western Germany (β= 0,107***), similar to what has already been shown in a previous Children Study (4th World Vision study 2018: 29–31, 205 et seqq). This result as well puts into perspective a potential immediate relationship between strong religiosity and a lack of religious tolerance, since families in eastern Germany are less often religious. In the German context, the household size also has an effect on tolerance: The larger the household in which a child lives, the lower their religious tolerance (β=-0.083***) This could potentially be related to the lower socioeconomic status of families of larger household size. Socioeconomic status has a positive effect, insofar as tolerance increases with increasing socioeconomic status (β=0.066**), which could be attributed to the effects of a better education or a lesser importance of distributional struggles for resources.

In the regression model for Germany, all independent and control variables combined explain 3.6% of the variance of the dependent variable of religious tolerance. In the Ghanaian regression model, it is 3.9% of the variance. Both percentages are rather low and indicate that religious tolerance depends on additional factors and should be regarded as a highly individual phenomenon.

Photo: World Vision

06. Religious rejection, stigmatization and discrimination

Photo: World Vision

Even though children in our in-depth interviews showed a high degree of religious tolerance in general and religious affiliation was of little importance to their friendships, it also became clear time and again from their reports that, depending on the context, certain religious groups were more likely to be affected by rejection and stigmatization than others.

In Ghana, these are mainly those who follow indigenous religious practices. They are not only rejected by children, but by society in general (cf. Okyerefo/Knizek 2018: 316). This becomes particularly evident in crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic: Some children with whom we conducted in-depth interviews echoed dismissive stereotypes about 'traditional' faith practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, seeing them as presenting risks of spreading the virus. They are concerned that unsanitary conditions prevail during rituals, libations and offerings in shrines (cf. Ntewusu and Nkumbaan 2020). Twelve-year-old Catholic IAD, for example, speculates that the blood of animals sacrificed in the shrines poses an infection risk:

> *“Because like maybe they will have a specific bowl that they pour the blood or something in the bowl. So, when somebody touches the bowl and the person leaves another person will touch it. If the person has the pandemic the person might also get the virus.”*
>
> (Ghana, IAD, girl, 12 years old, Catholic)

Two of the children from Ghana we interviewed, who are members of indigenous religions, also report experiencing rejection in their living environment, as thirteen-year-old AN explains:

> *“They tell me by pouring libation, killing a goat, pouring the blood on the shrine is not a good thing for me to do as a young boy.”*
>
> (Ghana, AN, boy, 13 years old, traditional)

Between the major religious groups such as Christianity and Islam, rejection, tension, or conflicts are rarely reported by children as affecting themselves, although many children have frequently interact with people of other faiths. The arguments arising in this context mostly concern religious practices. Twelve-year-old Catholic IAD says that Muslim children tend to find the sermons at Christian gatherings boring, though she agrees to a certain extent.

> ***IAD:*** *Sometimes when they talk that is like the Pastors. When they talk about the Pastors and the religion sometimes how they talk you will agree with them, sometimes too you will disagree with them.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *So what will make you agree with them?*
> ***IAD:*** *Like how the Pastors preach. The way they preach is boring. You feel like sleeping and sometimes too they preach and like you get entertained. Like you listen to what they are saying.*

This narrative shows that, apart from rather harmless disputes about faith practices, there is a high level of mutual knowledge about the procedures and contents of other faith communities, which is a prerequisite for being able to compare worship services with each other. Other children say that members of Christianity and Islam are criticising each other for the way they dress, but even this doesn't concern them personally.

Thirteen-year-old Muslim girl FAG, on the other hand, says that she has often heard negative or factually incorrect statements about Islam in her life world, although some of these statements were also made by other Muslim children. This points to intra-religious tensions that are also found among Christian children.

> ***Interviewer:*** *So have you heard anyone talking bad about your religion?*
> ***FAG:*** *With this, for me because I go to Islamic classes I have learnt a lot of things about Islam and when I sit somewhere and hear someone saying something bad against it, I feel very bad.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *Ok.*
> ***FAG:*** *So, I have to approach the person and tell the person, he or she hasn't been to Islamic class before and I have been there and I know what is good for Islam, the Muslims and I know what is bad for Muslims.*

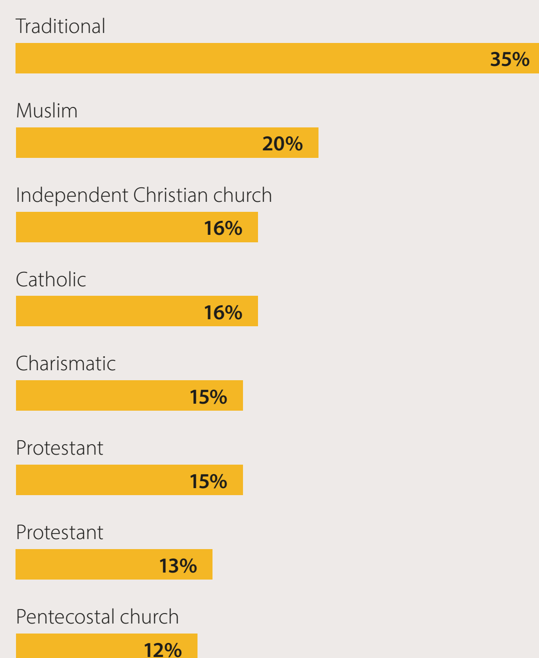
In our quantitative survey, all children were asked if they had already experienced discrimination as a result of their religion or their being non-believers, their appearance or language, in order to be able to reveal potential effects of interactions between different affiliations. The abstract concept of discrimination was operationalised through the following response categories: The children were asked whether they had been "attacked or beaten up," "excluded or ignored" or "insulted and called names" once, repeatedly, frequently, or never on account of their religion or appearance or language. Overall, only few children in both countries reported experiencing discrimination (16% in Ghana, 11% in Germany), although certain religious groups reported it significantly more than others.

Children in Ghana affiliated with an indigenous religion are particularly likely to have these negative experiences. For example, 14% of all children of an indigenous religion say they were ridiculed, insulted or called names because of their religion. Another 17% of children of this religion said that had already this had happened more than once. This is significantly more than for children of other faiths. One in four children in Ghana belonging to an indigenous religion (26%) was excluded or ignored at least once in their lives because of their religious affiliation. This also is significantly more than for other children. One in seven children of an indigenous religion (15%) was attacked or beaten up at least once because of their belief system.

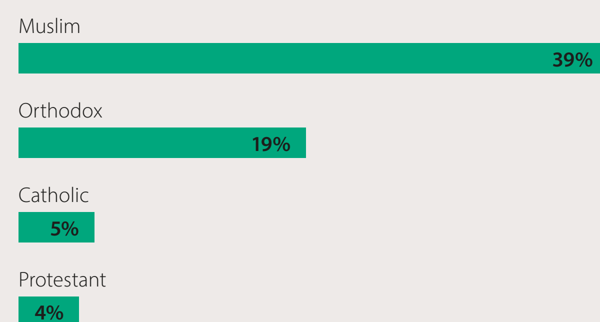
However, discrimination based on language and appearance also affects children of other religious affiliations, which can be explained by overlaps between religion and ethnicity in certain cultural practices that reveal an affiliation, such as clothing styles and choice of language. In Ghana, 15% of all children surveyed stated that they had been ridiculed, insulted or called names at least once because of their appearance and language. Non-believing children (22%) have this experience significantly more often than children who belong to the Pentecostal church (12%).

Children ridiculed, insulted or called names at least once because of their religious affiliation

Ghana



Germany



Basis: Children of the respective faith community

More than one in ten children (11%) have been excluded and ignored at least once because of appearance and language. Protestant children (10%) and those of an indigenous religious affiliation (6%) are significantly less affected by this experience than Muslim (14%) or secular children (17%) in Ghana.

According to the statistical data we gathered in Germany, one in ten children (11%) has been discriminated against on the basis of religion, with Muslim children being particularly affected. For example, two out of five (39%) children of Muslim faith had been ridiculed, insulted or called names once or several times—27% of them even multiple times. This is significantly more than children from other faith communities in Germany. Likewise, Muslim children in Germany are significantly more often excluded or ignored than other children. One in ten Muslim children report having had this experience at least once, more than a quarter of them (28%) even multiple times. One in six Muslim children (17%) was attacked or beaten up because of their faith.

In Germany, 15% of all children surveyed said that they had been ridiculed, insulted or called names at least once because of their appearance and language. It is primarily Muslim children who experience this type of discrimination. 44% of Muslim children provide these as the reasons for having been insulted or called names at least once. This is significantly more than the percentage of Catholic, Protestant and secular children with this experience. 13% of all children report having been excluded and ignored at least once based on appearance and language. This is the experience of 2 out of 5 (40%) Muslim children. They are also significantly more affected by this than Catholic, Protestant and secular children in Germany.

Even in our in-depth interviews in Germany, only very few children report to have personally experienced explicit religious discrimination. Their accounts nevertheless show that some religious groups, in certain life contexts perceive their faith as being considered inferior and fear that they might one day be discriminated against. Kerem, a fourteen-year-old Muslim, does not experience rejection in his interfaith circle of friends, but he tells of Islam-critical or islamophobic media coverage invoking stereotypes of Islam as a terrorist threat.

"I once saw something on TV. But not yet from people I know. They [on TV] say that Islam is people who throw bombs and so on—I don't think that's nice."

(Germany, Kerem, boy, 14 years old, Muslim)

Other children also report of anti-Muslim racism in their life world, like thirteen-year-old Finn, who is Protestant. He says that he has heard of "prejudices" against Muslim people, but that he does not share them:

"There are many prejudices. Also with regard to religions. For example, that all believers in Islam are terrorists and build bombs and stuff. That's not true, of course. That's complete nonsense. There are also good people. After all, those who do it, don't do it because this is their religion, but because something makes them do something bad. But it has nothing to do with their religion."

(Germany, Finn, boy, 13 years old, Protestant)

In his interview, Finn also mentions the persecution of Jewish people in Germany as a historical example of religious discrimination.

"There was this persecution of the Jews. Under Hitler. That's when Judaism was oppressed in particular. And that was terrible. Simply because he didn't realize [...] or most Germans didn't realize that Judaism is just a religion like Christianity and like the others – Buddhism and Hinduism and like Islam."

(Germany, Finn, boy, 13 years old, Protestant)

Jewish siblings Noam (12) and Sarah (16) interviewed by us are even more aware of discrimination up to explicit insults. They say that, like other Jewish children, they need to be careful about the extent to which they can reveal their Jewish identity in public.

“We sometimes go to camps. And then we also get T-shirts or sweatshirts or I also have a chain, and then it hasn’t happened to me that somebody has looked at it, saying ‘oh yea, you’re Jewish’ or something like that. But I’ve heard it from others, he had a shirt on with a slogan and he was insulted or people asked about that. And that’s sad.“

(Germany, Sarah, girl, 16 years old, Jewish)

The Jewish siblings also say that anti-Semitic narratives had been mobilized during the pandemic to blame Jewish people for it: "The Jews were accused of it. The Jews are also to blame for the plague. So the Jews are also to blame for Corona."

Sixteen-year-old Muslim Mehmet recounts a verbal assault by a stranger in a public space:

“In the street. I was with my father. Then a man who was drunk came and said, "Well, you people with the black hair, you surely believe in Mohammed..." But I was still little at that time. Then he said something about our prophets.“

(Germany, Mehmet, boy, 16 years old, Muslim)

Mehmet's story reveals a combination of religious and ethnic discrimination characteristic for the German context. Because of Germany's history, the country is dominated by the concept of a “national ethnic cultural” identity of the nation state (Mecheril 2002: 109) in which the category of “religion” is gaining increasing importance (Lingen-Ali/Mecheril 2016: 17).

Photo: Delmaine Donson

07. Conclusions

Photo: Onfokus

Children as co-agents of social change processes

This first international World Vision Children Study with a focus on religious diversity is fitting in a time where development cooperation goes though a transformation process. The current question is how the relationship between partner countries from the 'global north' and the 'global south' can be decolonized and what it should look like in the future. True partnership in development cooperation requires us to refrain from generalized assumptions for cultural areas and to facilitate an exchange of values on an equal footing, especially when it comes to managing crises. The 5th World Vision Children Study therefore performs a twofold shift in perspective, which we find fruitful for a decolonized development policy in the global community. It does not focus on the perspective of children from Germany alone, but, contrary to the 'traditional perspective' of development cooperation, shows us what Germany can learn from Ghana and what grown-ups in both countries can learn from their children.

The younger generation plays a crucial role in moving us forward as a global community. Children are agents of change as they participate in social transformation processes and should therefore be seen as competent discussion partners. This also includes the debate about religious positions and interfaith coexistence, which is much more common in countries like Ghana than in Germany. Children and adolescents challenge us to engage in a dialogue with other religious and secular worldviews, to explain positions, to negotiate with each other, and to allow coexistence.

Interfaith contacts and friendships

The life worlds of children and adolescents in today's world can be highly diverse. Due to the geographic distribution of population groups and the selectivity of educational and recreational facilities as a result of catchment areas and financial access barriers, children in some places rarely have contact with other children who come from a different social, cultural, or religious background than their own.

Other children, on the other hand, grow up in "contact zones" (Pratt 1991) of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and affiliations, especially those living in metropolitan areas. Their life worlds are "super diverse" (Vertovec 2007: 1024) when social differentiation categories such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or socioeconomic status intersect in multiple ways. It means that children may meet other children, who, while sharing the same mother tongue, have a different religion, or that children and parents from completely different ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds meet in their religious communities. When children get in touch with each other, they tend to engage in interfaith friendships—this is our key finding for the two study countries, Germany and Ghana. They practice strategies of coexistence and are able to bridge significant differences in background, resources, or family habitus in their contacts and friendships with one another. At the same time, they, like adults, are affected by discrimination and we should also listen to them in this regard.

Religious interpretations in interactions with others

The central question of this study, i.e., how children handle religious diversity in their life worlds, presupposes a basic understanding of children's religiosity or lack thereof. Religiosity is composed of the collective membership in a religious group or community and the personal faith in the form of an actively practised relationship with God. For children who believe, religious patterns of interpretation acquired through socialization provide a way of making sense of events taking place in their life world. Our data show that children perform independent adaptations and constructively draw on different interpretations of religious differences and similarities, for example, to create a sense of community between themselves and their friends from a different faith. Children in Ghana generally have a much better understanding of their own faith and practices and those of others. For them, religious tolerance results from the fact that there may be a difference in religious affiliation and practice, but that, ultimately, they are the same because they all believe in the same God, as twelve-year-old JA puts it:
“He has many names but in all He is one God.”

In Germany, on the other hand, children hardly ever deal with the substance of faiths or the practices of other religions. For them, religious tolerance rather results from the fact that freedom of faith is anchored in the constitution, and that the freedom to profess a religious or creed is inviolable.

It needs to be noted, however, that children are taught highly contradictory religious interpretations, especially with regard to the experience and actions of people of other faiths. A high percentage of children in Ghana and of smaller religious groups in Germany are aware of and affirm exclusivist interpretations that those with different beliefs will be punished in the afterlife because they did not have the 'right' religion. Interestingly, however, these children are also statistically more likely to have interfaith contacts and friendships than members of comparator groups (Ghana vs. Germany; religious minorities in Germany vs. Christian faith groups in Germany). The question therefore is to what extent they confirm familiar patterns of interpretation without, however, considering them important for their own lives. The study therefore looked at the relationship between personal faith and/or religiosity of the family and religious tolerance.

Religiosity and religious tolerance

We took a closer look at the relationship between children's religiosity and their religious tolerance, which is generally high in both study countries, and found interesting differences. Children in Ghana were found to be more tolerant of other religions the more developed their personal religiosity and that of their family was. For children in Ghana, this means that a deeper understanding of their own faith and a close relationship with God as well as religious family habitus go hand in hand with more religious tolerance. In Germany, on the other hand, we see a contrary effect. The personal religiosity of children does not significantly influence their religious tolerance. The more developed the family/structural religiosity of children, the less tolerant they are of other religions. Additional correlations exist with regard to household size, lower socioeconomic status and eastern Germany as the region of origin. This result for Germany can be interpreted as meaning that opportunities for contacts with people of other faiths, which are more prevalent in many West German contexts than in East Germany, as well as education-specific effects improve religious tolerance.

Knowledge-based religious pluralism competency

Our findings from Ghana show that strong personal faith and collective religious practice do not stand in the way of children being highly skilled pluralists. Religiosity can therefore be a personal and a collective resource of social cohesion, especially in times of crisis. In the German context, however, the situation seems to be different. Against the backdrop of a geographic and quantitative distribution of faith groups, and the associated limited contact opportunities for children and their families in religiously homogeneous places, there seems to be much less engagement with other beliefs and practices in Germany, and this is supported by the German attitude or relegating faith to the private sphere. Interfaith coexistence and interfaith dialogue rarely feature in the public discourse in Germany, and when they do, the discussion is usually about the problems rather than the opportunities and the possibilities offered by it. In Germany, the rejection of people of other faiths is a concept that extends across religions and secular worldviews and always kicks in when there is a lack of positive contacts and experiences that could compensate for it. In contrast to what can be assumed for the adult population, children in Germany have strong pluralism competency, but these are rather based on making religion less of a topic. This means that little importance is given to religious affiliation, individual beliefs and religious practices in the interfaith contacts of children, and these topics are hardly ever discussed or evaluated. For children in Germany, religion is a private matter. A lack of knowledge about the faiths of others and a lack of emotional involvement and empathy for what their faith means to them appear to provide less of a basis for religious coexistence than what the data examples show for Ghana. Sustainable pluralism competence also requires a knowledge base in order to understand why certain practices are or are not important to people. The engagement with other faiths and practices can also facilitate the reflection on one's own faith. Reservations concerning interfaith contacts or contacts between religious and non-religious worldviews, supposedly to avoid alienating or confusing children, are widespread in Germany, but must be overcome. Our data from Ghana prove that religious depth and knowledge of other faiths can go hand in hand with tolerance of other religions.

However, it should also be noted that relegating religion to the private sphere protects the social position of children and adults who are not members of a monotheistic religion—this can be seen in Ghana in the marginalisation of atheism and indigenous religions. Religious communities in Germany and Ghana have a responsibility to ensure that their children can learn tolerance of people of other faiths, including atheism and other secular worldviews, from religious interpretations.

08. Political demands

Due to the different contexts, the following political demands refer to Germany only. Appeals to policy-makers in Ghana will be advocated by World Vision Ghana in their publications and working materials.

1

Fighting racism and religious discrimination

This Children Study, as our older study on the situation of refugee children in Germany, also indicates that children experience verbal and at times physical abuse, which is often attributable to an underlying combination of racism and religious discrimination. Children from religious minorities in Germany are more affected by this undercurrent, with their ethnic origin or cultural affiliation (many of them have a 'migration background') being contributing factors. World Vision is calling for a large-scale anti-racism education and development programme where anti-racist and anti-discriminatory behaviours and attitudes are promoted in the life worlds of children and adults through appropriate, tailored campaigns. Appropriate anti-racism and pro-democracy programmes must also take into consideration how to support children, who experience racism and religious discrimination. It is essential to create adequate offers for these children, providing them with empowering coping strategies.

2

Overcoming neocolonialism

Development cooperation is geared towards the goal of contributing to making the world a fairer place through a rights-based approach. This requires reflection on the extent to which development policy and development cooperation may contribute to the perpetuation of unequal global structures. The need to develop cannot be unilaterally attributed to countries of the "Global South". Instead, social development must take place as a joint international process at eye level. World Vision calls for the development of targeted learning processes in current and future development programmes, evaluating lessons learned from programme country-specific contexts and applying them to German contexts. The children in both contexts are more than the holders of rights, as is shown in our study on the freedom to profess a faith or other creed. They also play a major role as potential agents of transformation and inspiration for transformation processes, encouraging social cohesion, as we can see in the children's particular pluralism competence and in other aspects highlighted in our study. However, the potential of younger generations often remains unrecognised, when development programmes are unwittingly developed from a one-sided, neocolonial perspective and the social impact of children as co-agents of the public sphere is underestimated.

3

Strengthening interfaith and intra-faith education in the school curricula

Schools play and important role in socialisation Depending on the local context, schools, like hardly any other institution, provide a platform for children from different backgrounds to come together. Interfaith diversity tends to be seen as a problem when discussing the German education system and invokes social discourses that aim for more secularisation of the school system as a solution. Considering the findings of our research in Ghana, according to which a high level of religious knowledge about one's own and about other religions and a strongly developed faith go hand in hand with a high level of religious tolerance, we advocate that interfaith world view education for all children be offered in schools and faith-based education be offered based on a child's interest. Knowledge of other faiths and worldviews is a prerequisite for finding common ground and developing interpretations that can help to constructively embrace our differences. Interfaith and secular values such as equality, solidarity and empathy must become a cornerstone of democracy education and help children to reflect on an be mindful of diversity. It is an essential prerequisite for empowering the young generation to counter the social polarisation and populist mobilisation of religion we see in many national and global contexts today, and providing them with superior, experience-based, emotional and cognitive pluralism competency.

4

The fundamental right to freedom of faith and the adequate implementation of this right in the life worlds of children

According to Art. 4 of the German Constitution (Grundgesetz, GG), the right to freedom of faith includes children. Article 3 of the GG prohibits discrimination against children because of their faith or religion. Especially in the school context, which is guided by the educational goal of tolerance, a plurality of beliefs must be accommodated, including not only different religions but also atheism, agnosticism, and other secular worldviews. Children must be free to decide whether or not and how to practice their religion in all contexts of their lives—in their family, at school, in their leisure time and in other situations—by offering/ allowing dietary choices, fasting schedules, and/ or types of clothing. Children and adolescents need settings in which they can develop their faith and/or views of the world independently, by exchanging knowledge, opinions, and approaches, and by exploring of practices and routines. Regulating religious practices by prohibiting or prescribing them strongly interferes with this exploration process. It constitutes not only a violation of the freedom of faith, but also deprives children of the opportunity to experience inter- and intra-religious plurality in their peer-to-peer relationships. The same imperatives arise with regard to the international context from Articles 14 and 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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